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**The Measure of Meetings: Forums,  
Deliberation, and Cultural Policy**

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# **The Measure of Meetings: Forums, Deliberation, and Cultural Policy**

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## Abstract

This research seeks to answer the question: “Do meetings matter for advancing cultural policy?” The question is approached **theoretically** and **comparatively** by examining the broader literature on policy making, as well specific case studies of meetings in other fields, in order to draw lessons and implications for arts and culture; **discursively and ethnographically**, by attending the annual meetings of arts service associations and recording and interpreting how people at these meetings talked about problems and policy; and **empirically**, by looking at a sample of conference program books over ten years and coding and analyzing what issues were discussed and who was invited to discuss them. We also studied, in detail, what a random sample of 40 participants say they learned at a particular annual convention and what policy-relevant actions they took as a result of having attended the meeting. Overall, we find that meetings are **not** currently effective tools for advancing policy in the cultural sector, with some notable exceptions. In arts and culture, where resources are modest, where the policy community is fragmented, where problems are poorly defined, where there is no central authority or government agency, and where issues have low salience for the general public, well-timed and carefully orchestrated meetings can perhaps play an even more important role than they do in other fields.

# The Measure of Meetings: Forums, Deliberation and Cultural Policy

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## Chapter 1: Introduction and Overview:

Meetings are big business, or in other words, talk is not cheap. A study by Deloitte & Touche LLP suggests that conventions, expositions, and meetings generated \$82 billion in total direct spending in 1994, supporting 1.57 million jobs (Rog and Wolffe 1994). Meetings of associations and membership organizations, as opposed to corporate-sponsored events, account for the lion's share of this spending (68 percent). Many of these associations serve the arts and culture.

In a recent paper Margaret Wyszomirski and Joni Cherbo (2001) conclude that there are more than 700 national membership organizations supporting the cultural sector, with a median size of 670 members per group.<sup>2</sup> If each of these associations sponsors an annual meeting that is attended by, say, one-third of its membership (or approximately 225 people) then aggregate meeting expenditures per year would top \$157 million.<sup>3</sup> This does not include state, regional, and local meetings of membership organizations. Nor does it include foundation, government, or university sponsored meetings, which might conceivably bring the total to \$200 million. To be conservative, let us say that our estimate is twice as high as the actual total. That would still mean that close to \$100 million are spent every year on meetings designed to advance and support the arts in the United States.

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<sup>2</sup> Wyszomirski, M and J.Cherbo. 2001. "Mapping the Associational Infrastructure of the Arts and Culture Sector: A Research Report to the Ford Foundation." April 2001. Arts Policy and Administration Program, The Ohio State University.

<sup>3</sup> Assuming that the average cost of attending a conference – including room, board, travel, and conference fees – is \$1,000

This number is, coincidentally, almost the same as the current annual appropriation for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). Scholars, journalists, politicians, and arts leaders take very seriously the public's investment in the Endowment. In fact, since 1990, there have been more than 500 articles in the *New York Times* alone that discuss NEA funding, not to mention the dozens, if not hundreds, of articles and books that have been written about the subject. As far as we can ascertain, Wyszomirski and Cherbo are the only scholars or analysts to recognize that the associational infrastructure matters to arts and culture, and they have not begun to tackle the question of whether and how the meetings that drive these larger associations – as well as smaller policy forums, workshops, and advisory committees - have an impact on the cultural sector.

Do meetings matter for advancing and strengthening the arts and culture? Could they be used to greater effect? These questions motivated a two year inquiry, “Meetings that Matter”, supported by the Pew Charitable Trusts and co-directed by Alberta Arthurs of MEM Associates and Steven Tepper. Meetings, of course, can matter in many ways, including creating forums to exchange information, establishing and reinforcing networks, and pursuing policy, program, or research goals. Although other meeting outcomes are equally deserving of research and analysis, our investigation focuses on the latter – the pursuit of what might loosely be called cultural policy. Do existing meetings serve to identify pressing cultural needs, discover ways to address these needs, and advance or change practice and policy? How might meetings and convenings be improved? What resources might be invested to link meetings more directly with purposeful action? What configuration of existing meetings and potential meetings might

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contribute to a more coherent and integrated field of cultural policy? This monograph discusses how we approached these questions, lays out some preliminary results, and offers suggestions for how to use meetings more effectively to advance policy for the arts and culture.

Meetings of cultural and arts practitioners and scholars come in all shapes and sizes. For the purposes of this research, we are examining annual meetings of national arts service and membership organizations, ad-hoc conferences and forums, advisory groups such as taskforces and commissions, and a variety of other gatherings where advancing policy is a primary objective. Many of these meetings are supported by foundations and nonprofit organizations; some are arms-length bodies loosely connected to the government while others are direct instruments of the government. We are not studying intra-organizational meetings (e.g., board meetings) or meetings that are part of the normal course of democratic governance (e.g., hearings or legislative committees). We are interested in how these conferences connect to cultural policy. The working definition of cultural policy that we used is as follows: *cultural policy represents the decisions (by both public and private entities) that either directly or indirectly **shape the environment** in which the arts are created, disseminated, and consumed.* It is important to reiterate that our inquiry does not attempt to evaluate meetings based on how effectively they build networks across a field; how well they deliver professional training and development; or the extent to which they foster general learning. We restrict our focus to the policy dimension of meetings.

Our research, described in the following chapters, begins with an inquiry into previous studies of the political or policy consequences of meetings. Surprisingly, given that meetings and conventions represent a larger proportion of the Gross National Product than the publishing industry and only slightly smaller than legal services, we found only a handful of books and articles that investigate their impact – and these studies focused narrowly on Presidential commissions and higher education reform commissions.<sup>4</sup> Early in our research we sought the guidance of John Kingdon, author of *Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policies*, a seminal text on the process of policy-making. “You stump me here,” he wrote in an e-mail. “Deliberation about policy choices is of course important, and it occurs all the time...I just never thought of ‘formal meetings’ as a separate category of analysis.” Therefore, in chapter 2, we review existing models of policy making in order to build a theory for the role of meetings and convenings as tools in the policy process. We also review a few studies on national and state-level commissions, and we scan several case studies of past meetings in a variety of fields. From this review, we identify when special convenings – especially gatherings of “expert” advisory bodies – might be useful tools. In addition, we draw together dozens of lessons about the characteristics of meetings (and the reports that they produce) that lead to positive policy outcomes. Finally, in chapter 2, we link these findings to the unique policy challenges and opportunities facing the cultural sector.

In chapter 3 we look at a particularly important forum in arts and culture: the annual meetings of national arts service associations. We attended more than a dozen of these meetings as “policy ethnographers,” paying careful attention to how communities or

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<sup>4</sup> See for example, Chapman 1973; Flitner 1986; Ginsberg and Plank 1995; Komarovskiy 1975; Luck 2000).

artistic disciplines understand cultural policy, how they frame their concerns, and the extent to which they are able to move conversations up the “policy ladder”- a framework that we use to analyze and categorize the various policy-relevant comments that are made throughout a meeting. Chapter 3 also analyzes the content in program books for the annual meetings of seven national arts service associations over eight years. We examine the title, description, and speakers for each panel, plenary address, and break-out session to see 1) how often policy issues appear on the agenda, 2) the nature and diversity of the panelists and speakers, and 3) the extent to which policy topics either overlap conferences or fields or are specific to one or another (and how this changes over time). We are particularly interested in the degree to which the arts community is fragmented or unified in its approach to policy concerns. After providing a statistical portrait of how policy gets discussed and the range of topics and participants at annual meetings, we draw upon our own observations at these meetings, along with roundtable discussions with almost 100 arts leaders, in order to highlight a few emerging topics and themes that cut across disciplines and fields.

In addition to this birds-eye view of policy-relevant concerns across disciplines and over time, we studied in detail the outcomes of a single meeting. At the conclusion of *pARTicipate 2001*, the joint summer meeting of the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies and Americans for the Arts, we conducted exit interviews with forty participants to determine what they learned and what strategies and actions they planned to undertake as a result of having attended the meeting. We then followed up with these participants to determine what they had actually accomplished in the interim and to

ascertain possible barriers to action. Chapter 4 summarizes this assessment, highlighting its methodology and outlining potential future research.

The concluding chapter of this report attempts to synthesize what we have learned to date and to suggest tentative strategies for how the cultural sector can make better use of existing meetings and pursue new convening strategies to advance and improve policy making in the field. This monograph is much larger than we initially intended. In part this reflects our need to bring together a variety of sources and approaches in order to understand the convening landscape in art and culture. But it also reflects our increasing enthusiasm for the opportunities presented by a more deliberate and strategic approach to convenings. We hope that these findings will give pause to anyone who cares about cultural policy, encouraging him/her to approach future and potential meetings both more critically and more opportunistically.

## **CHAPTER 2: The Role of Meetings and Forums in the Policy Process – Lessons and Implications for the Cultural Community**

### **Introduction**

To answer our primary research questions “do meetings matter for advancing policy in the cultural sector?”, we began by investigating what existing policy research says about meetings generally. In other words, do meetings matter for policy in other, more closely studied domains? This section opens with a look at a few prominent theories of the policy making process, with special attention to the extent to which meetings and forums are or are not emphasized. In general, we find that scholars have not developed strong theories about where formal meetings fit within policy development and practice. We then turn to review briefly the existing case study research focusing on presidential commissions, convenings in the education sector, and selected studies of commissions and task forces in other fields. Based on this review, we highlight several broad lessons about when strategic forums (especially formal advisory groups) are appropriate for advancing policy as well as features that are linked to successful outcomes (policy implementation, public awareness, intellectual development of a field). Finally, we examine the unique challenges facing art and culture as a policy field and the role that meetings might play in helping to shape cultural policy. We conclude this section by introducing a grid that presents a rough-hewn typology of 30 different meeting types.

### **Policy Making and Convenings: A Review of the Literature**

For the last three decades, political scientists, sociologists, and policy analysts have paid increasing attention to the processes by which policy is made in the United States.

Typically, they have focused on pre-decision policy (agenda setting, pressure groups, political mobilization); decision-making and authoritative choice (congressional and presidential decisions, legislation, rule making, the role of public opinion); and policy enactment (public administration, implementation, program evaluation). Additionally, there has been a renaissance in interest about “deliberative democracy” – the idea that a democratic government prospers only when its citizens participate actively in forums and discussions about issues of public concern. This latter focus might be considered the public “context” for policy making rather than the decision making process per se. In the next section we will focus primarily on the first process (pre-decision agenda setting) and refer briefly to the last (deliberative democracy). Again, we are hoping to identify how meetings and forums fit into these theories of policy making.

In 1984 John Kingdon published his field-defining work, *Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policies*, which set out to understand, “why important people pay attention to one subject rather than another, how their agendas change from one time to another, and how they narrow their choices from a large set of alternatives to a very few.” (1). Kingdon approached his research question by interviewing 247 opinion leaders (congressional staff, lobbyists, upper level civil servants, political appointees, researchers, elected officials, consultants) in the fields of health and transportation. He asked these individuals, “What major problems are you and others in the (health/transportation) area most occupied with these days? Why? What proposals are on the front burner? Why?” (5). Based on the data he collected, Kingdon created a model of agenda setting that includes three separate streams, each operating relatively independently from the other.

First, the *problem* stream consists of the set of issues that government, the media and the public believe are pressing and in need of attention. He suggests that problems come into bold relief when indicators change (e.g., unemployment rises) or by a focusing event (e.g., train crash). Second, the *policy* stream involves the set of alternatives, at any one time, that are considered and debated. This set is drawn from a larger "policy primordial soup" made up of popular and less popular alternatives and ideas that are circulated by specialists, academics, and think tanks. Finally, Kingdon discusses the *political* stream, or what others have called the political opportunity structure – in other words, the extent to which decision makers are receptive to new ideas and alternatives. Swings in the national mood, public opinion, a change in administration, pressure exerted from interest groups, elections, and Congressional turnover all affect the political stream and the willingness of decision makers to entertain certain ideas.

Kingdon emphasizes the importance of "coupling", when the three separate streams -- problems, policies and politics -- come together. At such moments, "solutions become joined to problems, and both of them are joined to favorable political forces" (194).

Coupling is most likely to occur during a *window of opportunity*, which typically opens when either a problem emerges in a highly visible manner or by a change in the political stream (new pressure, campaign, election, administrative turnover, scandal). Windows can be predictable – for example, rule making or when legislation comes up for renewal. They can also be unpredictable – such as, an airline crash or a corporate scandal.

Kingdon suggests that policy entrepreneurs (foundation officers, congressional staffers,

lobbyists) are key to bringing together the three streams and pushing their pet projects at just the right time. Kingdon's policy process is depicted in figure 1.

Although meetings and forums are not explicitly mentioned in Kingdon's model, it is worth examining figure 1 to see where such gatherings might fit. In the problem stream it is clear that certain high-visibility commissions, taskforces or summits might draw attention to changing indicators or might serve to re-frame a problem in a new way (for example, when the Kerner Commission reported in 1968 that the problem of racial unrest and violence could be recast as a problem of white racism). Other forums might serve to bring together special interest groups to identify a collective problem that was overlooked before they found a common voice and message (such as, recent efforts to bring together libraries, museums, artists, scholars and free expression activists around issues of copyright and the public domain). Finally, convenings can be used to vet and amplify the findings of new research that identifies a growing or urgent problem – that is, they can be the window dressing to call attention to an important report that might otherwise be overlooked.<sup>5</sup>

With regard to the policy stream, meetings and forums are essential. The policy stream contains what Kingdon calls a “community of experts” – scholars, policy activists government program managers – who share ideas, review each other's proposals,

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<sup>5</sup> For example, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) released a report in 2001 that highlighted “chronic problems” in the way federal agencies and departments manage historic resources owned by the government. The report identified thousands of federal properties that were in danger from neglect and found that the federal government was not complying with existing legislative mandates. The report, *Caring for the Past, Managing for the Future: Federal Stewardship and America's Historic Legacy*, received virtually no attention or press coverage when it was released in March 2001 and has had almost no

challenge one another, and ultimately revise and improve alternatives. Kingdon suggests that in order for such policy communities to thrive, relevant actors must know each other's ideas, proposals and research, and must have strong personal contacts as well. (117). In the U.S. health care field, the interaction among experts was formalized in a tradition called the Health Staff Seminar, funded by foundations, which brought together government health specialists to hear presentations, think about common problems, and meet one another in a quasi-social context (see figure 3, policy design). In the arts field, the recently established Preservation Working Group, which includes representatives of the major, national, nonprofit, preservation organizations and government workers who oversee preservation throughout the federal government, is an example of a forum that was created to help strengthen a "community of experts" in heritage and preservation.<sup>6</sup> Finally, in terms of the policy stream, Kingdon talks about the importance of "tipping", or the bandwagon effect – when some ideas diffuse through the community and take hold, and others do not. A well-timed meeting with the right cast of experts can activate this process of narrowing the range of options—where specialists join up and link up behind certain proposals.

It is more difficult to identify a role for convenings in the political stream, where the daily pushes and pulls of power and influence seem to be largely immune from the "softer" sway of deliberation and convening. Moreover, meetings have little to do with the large-scale political changes (the turnover of an administration or department, newly

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impact on raising heritage concerns on the agenda of decision makers. A strategically timed meeting may well have helped to catapult the report before the public, the press and government officials.

<sup>6</sup> The Preservation Working Group has been convened by the Center for Arts and Culture in Washington, D.C..

elected congressional seats, political party maneuvering) that seem to determine when windows of opportunity open. If the political opportunity structure is closed to certain ideas (because of an economic downturn, deficits, political alignment or the adoption of new laws or policies that are at odds with an idea), then perhaps strategic meetings can serve as wedges to open systems that might otherwise remain closed (for example, a commission or a political caucus can result in the strategic re-alignment of officials or groups that might create an opening for a new idea). More importantly, a regular working group, or roundtable or taskforce might serve to keep an idea alive – while softening up potentially important audiences – until the opportunity structure opens up. Finally, it is worth considering how meetings can help develop policy entrepreneurs: either by providing them a platform to try out ideas and an avenue along which to push them at the right time; or by providing access to decision makers (some of whom might serve together on the same commission or task force); and finally by helping entrepreneurs identify predictable policy windows likely to open in the future (for example, when a meeting is organized around trying to assess the political opportunity structure and to identify future openings).

Political scientist Thomas Dye has formulated a model of policy making that is similar to Professor Kingdon's notion of a policy community, except that Dye focuses almost entirely on elite actors. In short, Dye maintains that there is a dense and overlapping network of influential leaders in government, business, academia, think tanks, foundations, and the media. The relationships among these individuals are essentially the tracks along which policy ideas travel. Policy entrepreneurs, if they are to be

effective, must come from within this structure of elites. While Dye does not focus explicitly on meetings and convenings, his diagram of the policy world (see figure 2) includes planning groups and commissions as prominent “switches” on the policy track, bringing academics, foundation officers, think tanks and lobbyists in touch with decision makers. Suffice it to say that Dye recognizes (although fails to elaborate) the critical role of convenings, especially as tools of the elite.

More recently, scholars have embraced the notion of “policy transfer” or “knowledge uptake” as an important lens through which to examine how policy changes come about. Essentially, this approach seeks to understand how governments learn from the experiences of other governments (policy transfer) and how decision makers locate, assess, and incorporate ideas from scholars and other experts in a field (knowledge uptake). Under what conditions do decision makers seek to learn about policy activities elsewhere? When do they search for new ideas and alternatives? How do they incorporate new knowledge and research into their decisions? What sources do they trust? In general, networks and personal interaction are seen as crucial to policy transfer, in contrast to academic reports and journal articles, electronic information, newsletters and other written information that play a relatively minor role in the transfer process (Wolman and Page 2002). Using an experimental design, John Lavis and colleagues (2002) found that face-to-face dialogue that brings together academics and policy makers around a particular set of reports or findings (where informal discussion can take place) is more effective than when policy makers read the reports without the face-to-face exchange. Wolman and Page (2002) interviewed 260 officials involved in urban

regeneration and found that officials relied on informal meetings and regular interaction (such as one-on-one exchanges, roundtables or study groups); they generally gave less standing to information that was received at one-off summits or conferences. One interviewee explained, “at a one-time public presentation or seminar, people can not really say what happened [or what they think] because they have to look good” (493).

Thus, those findings seem to suggest that transfer is most likely to take place when strong networks can be established among between decision makers, scholars, and experts and when there are on-going forums and conversations that allow these individuals to meet, exchange ideas, and develop trust and common approaches to policy.

Finally, scholars have written extensively about, and practitioners have experimented with, the notion of deliberative democracy, where citizens engage in debate and dialogue in an effort to arrive at rational views of the public interest. In practice, this involves citizen forums, town hall meetings, public conversations, study groups, citizen juries and a range of other meeting styles that foundations and nonprofit organizations have promoted across the United States in the past two decades. The National Issues Forum, supported by the Kettering Foundation, is a good example of a deliberative democracy effort. These forums and convenings are intended primarily to engage citizens in conversation and are divorced from political action (for example, such citizen groups rarely have direct ties to decision makers, and they often do not arrive at consensus or specific policy recommendations). It is worth noting that the arts community has actively encouraged and organized these forums – such as Anna Devreau Smith’s *Art and Civic*

*Dialogue* project, Americans for the Art's *Animating Democracy* program, and the Association of American Museums' *Museums and Community Initiative*. (McCoy 1997). All of these efforts are built around the notion that public life can be enriched when diverse citizens come together to discuss and debate issues related to the arts. Without evaluating the success of these programs in terms of measurable impact on policy, it is likely that citizen-based deliberation helps to build a community's overall capacity for self government, and in the case of the arts, to create a public that is more equipped to talk about and consider art and culture in terms of public life and policy. The cultural community might consider pursuing stronger relations with existing deliberative democracy organizations and their efforts in order to promote the arts as a possible topic area.

In summary, although most policy scholars have not adequately addressed the role of convenings as instruments of policy making, a review of the literature suggests that meetings might be important tools in the following ways: 1) in helping to frame or re-frame a problem; 2) by calling attention to new and important research; 3) by creating and sustaining communities of experts; 4) in softening up audiences for a new idea or proposal; 5) by sustaining the momentum for an idea during politically fallow times (when the political system is not receptive to a particular approach or idea); 6) through fostering policy transfer and knowledge uptake; 7) in helping policy entrepreneurs test ideas, develop meaningful and influential contacts and networks, and predict or plan for the opening of future policy windows; and 8) by promoting citizen engagement. Future research should examine more carefully the conditions under which different types of

meetings are most effective. The type of meeting (from task forces and blue ribbon commissions to study groups), the range of participants, the intended policy outcomes (whether in the policy, problem or politics stream), and the existing relationships between experts and decision makers are all factors that contribute to the success of a meeting. We need better theories and carefully designed studies that help predict when and under what circumstances a meeting is likely to matter for policy.<sup>7</sup>

### **Advisory Commissions and Taskforces**

Advisory commissions and taskforces are, perhaps, the most widely used convening structure. Such advisory bodies are typically set up to study a problem or issue and have a fixed duration. They tend to be well funded and staffed and are often composed of distinguished individuals. Rick Ginsberg and David Plank (1995) contend that blue ribbon commissions are an increasingly common feature of the American political landscape. They write, "In fields as diverse as health care, nuclear energy, economic competitiveness, and race relations, governors and presidents have called upon commissions of experts to produce reports geared toward diagnosing problems and prescribing remedies. All levels of government have made use of commissions at various times, as have private organizations and foundations seeking to influence public policy."

(3). Presidential commissions are the most visible and most written about (Tuchings 1977; Marcus 1985; Flitner 1986; Hollander 1992; Plank 1995; Deal 1995; Linowes

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<sup>7</sup> See Walters et al. (2000). This paper begins to develop a framework for thinking about what type of meeting is likely to be most effective under what circumstances. Key variables include: 1) the extent to which the meeting is structured (from well-structured, e.g., public hearings, to unstructured, e.g., neighborhood meetings); 2) the purpose of the meeting (define problems, generate alternatives, legitimate existing proposals, shift public opinion, build coalitions, etc.); and 3) the nature of the issues under

1998). Well over 100 commissions have been created over the past six decades.

Examples include presidential commissions on Obscenity and Pornography, the Status of Women, Migratory Labor, Urban Problems, Heart Disease, Cancer and Stroke, and the Commission on Libraries.

Tuchings (1979) completed one of the most comprehensive statistical portraits of 97 presidential commissions from Truman through Carter, focusing on the factors that were related to the successful adoption of commission recommendations by the President or Congress. Flitner (1986) examined presidential commissions in the 1970s and 1980s, examining on the process of commissioning – how they are set up, how they are staffed, and the nature of the work they do.

Do government-initiated commissions influence policy by developing well-researched and carefully considered analysis and recommendations? Many have argued that commissions are not relevant and coordinated programs of research, but rather symbolic responses to problems (Bell 1966; Flitner 1986). Commissions allow politicians to deflect attention away from their own inability to address adequately an intractable problem. They can “appear to be doing something,” while they are, in fact, simply postponing an indefinite future decision (Chapman 1973). In a stinging rebuke Paul Peterson of the Brookings Institute wrote, “The [commission] reports themselves prove to be disappointing. If we judge them by the standards ordinarily used to evaluate policy analysis, they simply do not measure up. With some exceptions, the studies do not

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consideration (the degree of conflict, the number of stakeholders, quality of available information, number of alternatives, confidence in outcomes).

address the most difficult conceptual and political issues. Instead, they reassert what is well-known, make exaggerated claims on flimsy evidence, pontificate on matters about which there could scarcely be agreement, and make recommendations that either cost too much, cannot be implemented, or are too general to have any meaning." (Marcus 1985, 65).

However, others have found that commissions can help to define problems and initiate or mobilize public opinion in support of various policies (Linowes 1998; Woanin 1975). In other words, they are less relevant for generating specific policies and more useful for putting an issue on the map, creating a sense of urgency, and changing the way a problem is discussed and understood by decision makers and opinion leaders. Moreover, Edward Luck (2000), who studied UN reform commissions, suggests that commissions must be measured less by their immediate impact on policy and more by their long term contribution to the "intellectual core" of an issue – providing a relatively coherent and prevailing point of view that can be the foundation for future research, debate and policy innovations. Tuchings (1979) concludes that while many special advisory groups fail to influence policy, the frequency and regularity of the use of commissions demonstrates that they serve an important and vital policy making function for certain issues and needs that, for a variety of reasons, are not likely to get resolved or addressed through the normal procedures of government. It is worth considering whether there are certain cultural policy issues that fit this bill – where a high visibility commission might be the only way to put an issue on the agenda.

Second in number and frequency only to presidential commissions are commissions and task forces on education policy. In higher education alone, there were more than 50 such commissions at the national level between 1929 and 1983 and more than 48 at the state level (Marcus 1985, 27). If you take into account advisory groups established to deal with K-12 education, the 20<sup>th</sup> century has ushered in hundreds blue ribbon panels and commissions in the field of education. Clearly these meetings represent a prominent strategy for education reform in this country. In higher education perhaps the most influential commission was the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, empanelled in 1967 and chaired by former University of California president, Clark Kerr. The Kerr Commission lasted six years and issued several “blue prints for action,” several of which are regarded as highly influential.<sup>8</sup> In the areas of primary and secondary education, the National Commission on Excellence in Education, with its seminal report “*A Nation at Risk*,” catalyzed the first wave of real reform in American education and framed the education debate for the next three decades. (Plank 1995, 7). Although there remains disagreement about the effectiveness of reform oriented commissions and task forces, in general, there is widespread agreement that these commissions have made urgent and compelling arguments for improving public education, capturing the public’s imagination, and mobilizing political support for building stronger and more effective schools.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The first report, *Quality and Education*, is thought by many to have resulted in the Basic Educational Opportunity Grants and a Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education, programs that were enacted by Congress. In 1970, the Commission issued *Higher Education and the Nation’s Health* that helped to shape the Health Manpower Training Act. (Lageman, 1999, 142).

<sup>9</sup> Another important case study is the 1989 Education Summit convened by President Bush and attended by most of the nation’s governors. Many people credit this meeting with setting in motion what is still the central thrust of education reform in the U.S. – the development of standards, assessments, and systems of accountability for schools based on how students perform on tests. The Summit led to the creation of an independent government body, the National Education Goals Panel and then to the establishment of a new

## Other Case Studies

In addition to blue ribbon commissions, scholars have written about other types of special convenings. Deal points out that every president since Jimmy Carter has convened an “economic summit” early in his presidency. At the state level, a model convening – “The Utah Growth Summit” was held by the governor in 1995 to engage the public and key decision makers in issues related to water, transportation and open space. Public meetings were organized in communities throughout the state in advance of the summit. Three working groups (Democratic based, Republican based, and a non-partisan group of local officials) were formed to review proposals and set out alternatives. The summit also included live broadcasts on statewide radio, television call-in shows, and Internet chat rooms. Many of the proposals put forward were eventually enacted by the legislature.

In addition, as Dye points out, private foundations have used convenings as important tools for influencing policy. In the early 1990s, the Carnegie Council on Ethics and International Affairs in New York conducted a series of luncheon seminars to bring together overseas speakers and scholars in contact with U.S. business and government leaders in order to reduce uncertainty about foreign markets in an effort to spur investment and joint ventures. The Rockefeller foundation created the Filer Commission (1973) in an effort to help the philanthropic community self-regulate, thereby preempting Congress from passing unfriendly legislation. The Commission led to the formation of

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federal funding stream to states for this type of reform. So, the original summit helped to spawn a number of important institutions – the Goals Panel, a highly publicized state-by-state report card; an influential nonprofit organization Achieve Inc., that focuses on standards and assessment; and the Goals 2000 funding stream.

the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy and the Independent Sector (Billant 2000). In 1994, the Pew Charitable Trusts held a meeting of environmental activists that resulted in the formation of a new coalition of local and regional environmental groups, the Southern Appalachian Forest Coalition, which has effectively worked to stop clear-cutting, protect roadless areas, and conserve old growth in the National Forests.

In the health field we have already mentioned the role of the Health Staff Seminar in fostering a coherent policy community in the area of health care. Hollander (1992) studied five other special health-related taskforces and commissions, including the Commission on Hospital Care, the Carnegie Commission on Medical Education, and the Task Force for Academic Health Centers. He argues that all of them produced a “substantial body of usable knowledge - policy relevant information and analysis that reached government decision makers, health care experts, and the attentive public.” (211). Also in the area of public health, the Rockefeller Foundation held a meeting in 1994 at its retreat center in Bellagio that brought together scientists, public health officials, and leaders from the pharmaceutical industry and from non-governmental organizations to discuss how to move forward with AIDS vaccination research. Prior to that meeting, support for such research was politically untouchable. The meeting led to the development of the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative, a program of research, advocacy, and policy development that has put AIDS vaccines on the global policy agenda.

Finally, it is worth noting the work of the Century Foundation (previously the Twentieth Century Fund), which has sponsored more than 30 task forces and produced dozens of policy reports on topics ranging from public television, foreign relations, urban preservation policy, and campaign finance to judicial selection, affordable housing and presidential debates. Have these task forces been effective? It is very difficult to make a direct causative audit of which task forces led to which piece of legislation or specific policy (although a cursory review of government hearings, testimony and news conferences in the *Congressional Record* and the *Federal News Service* revealed more than 150 references to reports produced by Twentieth Century Fund and Century Foundation task forces over the last two decades).<sup>10</sup>

### **General Lessons: Roles and Outcomes**

A review of the many books and articles that examine commissions, taskforces, summits and other strategic meetings reveals a number of important lessons. First, we can identify several roles that advisory commissions (and similar convening bodies) can play in the policy process

- **develop informed analysis upon which policy may be constructed**
- **educate the public and decision makers about an issue in an effort to move it up on the government's agenda (focus or redefine a problem and/or create an atmosphere of crisis and opportunity)**
- **mobilize support for an existing solution or alternative (expert validation)**

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<sup>10</sup> Adolf Berle, a lawyer, statesman, and professor at Columbia University described the work of the Foundation: "It is like shooting seeds into the air. Intellectual work is always like that. You can never see the chain of causation. You can only say that at least you have helped create a matrix of ideas and structure out of which things do happen.... Perhaps a few thousand men are now in positions of opinion and decision-making who are familiar with situations (and well-informed), rather than having questions burst on us to be settled only the politician's hunch or some temporary cry for assistance." (TC Fund, [http://www.tcf.org/About\\_TCF/History.html](http://www.tcf.org/About_TCF/History.html)).

- respond to a crisis in an effort to reassure the public that the government is “ doing something.”
- manage divisive issues and interject analysis into highly contentious policy areas
- deflect attention from a politically intractable issue while appeasing constituents in the short term
- serve as a tool to surmount bureaucratic obstacles by pooling resources across departments or agencies, or otherwise interjecting new ideas where government routines or departmental turf wars create stagnation and resistance to change (including administrative reform)
- provide an “ intellectual core” for a policy community – by producing debate-defining reports that are the impetus for future study and discussion
- recruit “ policy entrepreneurs” who, because of their involvement in a special convening, might work on behalf of an issue well after their formal role on a commission or task force has ended.
- serve as a tool to extract research (at no additional cost) from government agencies and departments (executive orders and statutes often direct all departments to cooperate fully with a commission and to furnish it with whatever information or assistance it may require to perform its duties) (Tuchings 1977).
- serve to bring together different sectors around a common policy problem (revealing inter-relationships and potential partnerships that were previously overlooked).
- serve as a stimulus for reflection, analysis or action at the local level (national commission reports often spur officials or civil society groups to organize task forces at the local level)<sup>11</sup>.

Second, we can identify characteristics of commissions and task forces that have been linked to successful outcomes.<sup>12</sup> The literature above suggests the following broad lessons:

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<sup>11</sup> Wallace et al. (1995) demonstrate this dynamic in their study of Pittsburgh-based task forces, where dozens of special advisory groups were set up to improve schools – drawing ideas and focus from the national debates generated by the National Commission on Excellence in Education.

<sup>12</sup> Success can be defined as 1) producing new ideas and proposals; 2) gaining the attention of top policy makers; 3) sparking interest among the media, academia and NGOs; 4) convincing some significant players to become advocates for the recommendations or ideas that are generated by a special convening; 5) demonstrating a shelf-life (for example, commission documents are cited and referred to by relevant policy actors over the long-term); and 6) leading to the implementation of recommendation through legislation or executive action.

- Task force or commission recommendations need to be specific enough to force policy makers to "decide" something. Vague recommendations, while easy to reach consensus on, are equally easy to avoid or ignore. Recommendations must be based on credible information and geared to the practical needs of policy makers.
- Convening bodies may be more effective when their goals are to study and recommend strategies for reforming existing agencies, programs, departments or policies rather than generating a "wish list" of new programs and new appropriations.
- The final report should carry a powerful central message. It should also state the reasons for and implications of each recommendation (for example, what are the costs or consequences of inaction?). Recommendations must be linked to problems.
- Organizers and participants should define and pay attention to intended audiences.
- Groups must have a clear mandate and sense of purpose, and goals and objectives should be attainable.
- Reports should be accompanied by a coherent press strategy with appropriate text and graphics to display the message (including organized media appearances by commission members).
- The process should be able to maintain excitement over time and not just create one big splash. Groups should not be disbanded after they issue a report. To increase the likelihood of executive or legislative response, commissions should have some institutionalized follow-up. For example, commissioners might meet again to discuss and evaluate the response to their report and "put public officials on notice that a public assessment of their response will be forthcoming" (Plank 1995, 190). A commission might also result in an on-going research program or additional meetings and convenings perhaps at a local level (if the original commission was national in scope).
- Special convenings must be adequately staffed and funded so that their goals can be achieved. They must also have sufficient time to complete their work.
- They must have strong, executive leadership - chairpersons with sufficient legitimacy and charisma to keep the advisory group on task, to ensure that all relevant information is heard and discussed, and to gently coerce the group into some type of consensus document that is bold and sweeping, but also concrete and authoritative.
- The process should be transparent with multiple lines of open communication, regular briefings, and interim reports (this is mainly relevant for local commissions and task forces).
- Reports and recommendations should be cognizant of political realities. They will be more successful if they take advantage of a "policy window" or reflect (and shape) the consensus of the political establishment. Luck (2000) maintains that the focus of most commissions

is typically on “ the logic and values of what they are proposing. But what they usually lack is a convincing political strategy based on hard headed analysis of the forces at work on policy makers and of how their proposals can be shaped or presented in a way to become a political – not just moral or rational – imperative.” (103).

- Membership to a special advisory group (commissions and task forces) should include prominent citizens and important stakeholders and constituencies. Some participants and staff should be well connected to potential decision makers so that they can function successfully as policy entrepreneurs, moving findings into action.

One final point is worth mentioning. The above lessons will be more or less relevant depending on the primary purpose of a convening. On the one hand, the goal might be to achieve rational and deliberative recommendations that have a chance of being implemented. On the other hand, a special convening might serve a more symbolic or ceremonial purpose, producing an important message or “call to action” to generate renewed community commitment to a problem or to develop a sense of urgency or greater public awareness. In the former case it might be advisable, in some instances, to limit public input in order to achieve consensus in the absence of political posturing. In the latter case, where the commission serves as a public platform, organizers need to pay attention to such things as the diversity and representation of the participants; the need to encourage disagreement and even dissent; flexibility to allow the process to go in its own direction; public involvement; and fanfare and public celebration around the group’s final accomplishment (for example, a special report). As Luck (2000) suggests, it is important for organizers to determine from the outset whether the strategy should be to work within the existing political constraints (getting decision makers to implement recommendations in the short-term); to focus on altering these constraints (changing the context for decision making over the long term) (96).

### **Connections to Cultural Policy**

How can we make sense of these findings from the perspective of the arts and culture? What are the implications for cultural policy? First, we will discuss the unique policy challenges facing arts and culture (as compared to other policy domains). Second, we will suggest that, given these challenges, meetings and convenings can play an important role in sustaining and nurturing the field and advancing policy. Third, we will briefly describe the current landscape of meetings in arts and culture and offer a critique in terms of their relevance for policy. Finally, we will examine a few instances where meetings in the cultural sector did manage to achieve policy traction and then offer future strategies for more effectively employing meetings to achieve policy objectives.

#### *Features unique to cultural policy*

To date, no scholar has attempted a systematic comparison between cultural policy and other policy domains (health, education, housing, and transportation). Nonetheless, a few prominent differences are apparent. With respect to the processes discussed by John Kingdon, one major difference for cultural policy is the lack of public salience or visibility for issues involving the arts and culture (with the exception of the NEA controversies in the early 1990s). This makes it very difficult to get issues on the public agenda. As Kingdon notes, “the greater the visibility of the policy domain, the less important are crisis and disaster” in focusing attention and coupling the policy streams (95). In the arts, not only is visibility low, but there are also few “focusing events” or crises that demand a policy response. Second, there are few existing indicators,

especially ones that can be counted, that point to potentially serious and urgent problems facing the cultural sector. Sectors like housing, for example, rely on indicators such as new home purchases, rates of home ownership, the number of abandoned properties, and the number of homeless; transportation has statistics on highway fatalities, airline safety, U.S. dependence on foreign oil, and the capacity of public transit systems. In health care there are indicators for the number of uninsured citizens, per capita health expenditures, infant mortality, and the spread of infectious disease, among others. The cultural sector lacks these indicators, especially at the national level. Third, compared to other domains, there are few well-organized stakeholders in the cultural sector that exert consistent pressure on the political stream. Fourth, the cultural sector lacks a major public agency or department, where resources and decision making authority is centralized and where policy activity coalesces. Finally, the cultural policy community is highly fragmented with little agreement on common policy problems or concerns. This last point, in particular, deserves greater elaboration.

*Fragmentation and development of a policy community*

Kingdon assessed the degree of fragmentation in the transportation and health sectors by asking major stakeholders (public officials, senior bureaucrats, lobbyists, leaders in the nonprofit sector, scholars, and journalists) what problems and alternatives they were concerned about. He found that “issue overlap” – where three or four of the same issues tend to show up on most people’s radar screens – was generally high in the health sector and much lower in transportation. He concluded that this disparity resulted from the differences in their policy communities. In the latter area, policy concerns tend to cluster

by modes – trucking, rail, highways, aviation, urban transit, and waterways. The fragmentation of the transportation community is, however, offset in part by the presence of a large federal agency that requires areas to work together, to coordinate, and to join in the same policy community. Like transportation, the arts are equally fragmented and dispersed by discipline. But in the case of the arts, the fragmentation is more acute because the field lacks a unifying umbrella agency (the NEA is simply not large enough, or active enough, to serve in this capacity).

Margaret Wyszomirski (2000) writes at length about the problems of fragmentation in the arts community. “The arts community is fragmented, incomplete and uncoordinated. It is fragmented by, for example, discipline, generation, ethnicity, and geography. It is incomplete - many community components are disorganized and key resources (information, evaluation and analysis) are woefully underdeveloped. And it is uncoordinated - many community segments are essentially strangers to one another and have few occasions to interact” (100). According to Kingdon, a disparate policy community results in policy fragmentation, where “the left hand knows not what the right hand is doing,” (119) leading to unintended consequences, program overlap, an inability to respond to crises, and a failure to cultivate shared understandings of problems and potential solutions. Finally, Wyszomirski claims that fragmented systems are more likely to remain static because they do not have a common platform to call attention to innovative alternatives (102).

As a solution, Wyszomirski points to several key ingredients for strengthening the policy community in the arts: think tanks, research centers, and strong networks among practitioners, scholars and journalists. She also suggests that forums and "convenings" can be important tools for integrating the policy community. In health care, she points to the role of the Health Staff Seminars in Washington, and in science policy, she highlights the Carnegie Corporation's five-year Commission on Science, Technology and Government. She writes, "There are no comparable forums in the fields of arts policy or cultural policy...Such forums and activities are crucial to the maintenance and effectiveness of policy communities" (Wyszomirski 2000). In addition, she contends that a strong policy community helps to develop new talent in a field; to position and raise the profile of potential policy entrepreneurs; to identify common issues and options; to serve as a site to test, debate, and refine ideas; and to coordinate research and advocacy agendas. In short, policy communities provide the seedbed for ideas to take root, grow and have influence, and meetings are, perhaps, the most important tools available to such communities. Wyszomirski argues that private foundations can help to develop a policy community in the arts by "underwriting forums that promote the expansion of a policy dialogue," including, she adds, multi-year blue ribbon commissions.

Later in this report we will provide empirical evidence of the extent of policy fragmentation in the arts community, and at the conclusion of this section, we will discuss more explicitly how convenings in the cultural sector might be used to overcome some of the unique policy challenges discussed above. Suffice it to say at present that although strategic policy forums promise to be useful for developing a policy community,

raising issues on the public agenda, defining problems, exerting political pressure, and coordinating policy approaches or administrative programs and resources, to date they have been used only sparingly by the cultural community.

*A few high profile convenings*

As we have seen in the introduction, the cultural community spends upwards of \$100 million a year on meetings. Many of these gatherings bring together, often annually, the members of national or regional arts service associations. Others reflect conferences, symposia, community forums, and other meeting venues hosted by universities, research centers, foundations and nonprofit cultural groups. These meetings are certainly important in many ways, they build networks, highlight successful programs and models, provide general education and enlightenment, and nurture new leaders in the field.

However, a scan of the field indicates that, compared to other policy domains, strategic policy-focused convenings (task forces, commissions, and study groups) are not a regular part of the arts and culture landscape and remain underutilized policy tools. There are exceptions, some of which we will discuss below. Nevertheless, we argue, that those meetings that are organized around cultural policy issues tend to fall short of many of the criteria important for altering the public agenda or influencing decision makers. Arts meetings usually produce reports with vague and general recommendations that have little direct connection to specific policy actors; they often discuss broad issues, but fail to define clearly problems that have immediate and recognizable consequences. They typically over represent the arts community and fail to engage effectively other policy areas and leaders from other sectors (they fall into the trap of “preaching to the choir”).

Arts meetings rarely take into account the political opportunity structure, nor do they include a political strategy to move findings or recommendations into action.

Dissemination and follow-up is often weak and special convenings and commissions in the arts tend to call for additional resources and new programs (“wish lists”) rather than examine how existing programs and resources might be improved (administrative reform). Finally, these convenings rarely collect new data, nor do they involve a systematic and rigorous investigation of an issue.

The American Canvas project, organized by Jane Alexander when she was chair of the National Endowment of the Arts, provides an example of a set of meetings that, we believe, failed to influence larger policy debates or decisions. The project began with a national conference in 1994, focusing on four broad issues: the artist and society, life long learning in the arts, arts and technology, and new ideas for federal funding. Six privately funded forums in cities throughout the United States followed this meeting. The forums included local and national leaders in the arts, business people, religious organizations, and civic groups, and dealt broadly with the issue of “how to determine the value of the arts in communities and how to build a solid infrastructure for the arts in America’s communities” (Larson 1997, 171). Dialogue from these forums informed the deliberation of a steering committee as well as a final meeting of cultural luminaries, resulting in a 1997 report, *American Canvas*, which was widely distributed within the cultural field.

We can not fully evaluate the success or failure of the American Canvas project at this time. Nonetheless, it seems to us that this convening project represents a missed opportunity to have a long-term impact on policy development in the United States. The final report is ambitious, but lacks coherence, direction and clarity. The recommendations are vague and disconnected from any immediate political opportunity. The report states that artists and communities must (161-170):

1. find ways to provide forums for some of the newer voices in the community
2. find new ways in which artists and arts organizations can bring art to the people
3. provide a forum in which both the economic needs of the arts, as well as the cultural and other services that the arts provide, can be discussed
4. determine the kinds of partnerships and collaborations that will be most effective in meeting the cultural and other needs of the community
5. move beyond the traditional role of the arts to recognize the ways the arts bring people together
6. develop a network of education, arts, and cultural organizations and institutions that are committed to arts education

These are just a representative sample of recommendations, but they fail to meet the basic criterion of being geared to the practical needs of policy makers. The report and the convening process itself were not cognizant of political opportunities, nor targeted at any particular “window of opportunity.” The report was covered in major U.S. newspapers, but headlines and lead paragraphs highlighted the finding that the “arts are elitist” and “out of touch.” *The New York Times* ran an article with the headline, “Study Links Drop in Support to Elitist Attitude in the Arts” (Milla 1997). Follow-up stories focused on the apparent controversy that the report was generating within the arts community. Rather than serving as a clarion call to redirect the country’s debate on the arts (as *Nation at Risk* did for education), the report served to broadcast to the public the squabbles and disputes within the cultural community. Some might argue that the report changed the

way we talk about the arts, ushering in the growing emphasis on “art in the service of communities” and the role of the nonprofessional and popular arts. But, as far as we can tell, the report did not spur additional studies, nor did it serve as a coherent document to frame future conversations, task forces, or policy initiatives.

The biennial conference organized by the The Getty Education Institute for the Arts represents another typical approach to meetings in the field. This conference brings together a wide array of arts practitioners, educators and scholars to discuss current ideas, new models and future prospects for arts education.<sup>13</sup> The conference serves as an important backdrop for the field, providing a forum for committed advocates to strengthen their collective resolve, to get new ideas, and to learn from each other. Yet, the issues discussed are broad and the participants are already committed to the cause (the meetings are not focused on connecting with decision makers outside of the arts education field). The forums have had little noticeable influence on how the debates are framed for the larger public (most likely because they have not been organized with this in mind). In short, there are few examples of carefully crafted and orchestrated convenings in the cultural sector that have produced a demonstrable impact on the shape and direction of policy.

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<sup>13</sup> Past forums have included: "The Role of Discipline-based Art Education in America's Schools" (1987); "Education in Art: Future Building" (1989); "Future Tense: Arts Education Technology" (1991); "Achieving National Education Reform: Art Education as Catalyst" (1993); and "Beyond the 3 R's" (1995).

*Examples of policy-relevant meetings in art and culture*

While most convenings in the cultural sector do not achieve significant policy traction (although they may advance other equally important goals), there are a few exceptions. First, the National Endowments for the Arts and Humanities, the Institute for Library and Museum Services, and several national service organizations convened a working group in 1995 in preparation for the White House Conference on Travel and Tourism. The group produced a white paper on cultural tourism that was used effectively to place culture squarely on the agenda of the White House Conference. Not only did the 1,500 delegates at the convention discuss culture prominently, but also a one-day cultural tourism workshop was organized on the following day. Moreover, the meetings led to the formation of the Partners in Tourism: Culture and Commerce (a coalition of Federal agencies and eight national cultural service organizations), five regional cultural tourism forums, and a “next steps” conference in Chicago in 1998. Because of these efforts, cultural tourism is now a significant area of interest for the Travel Industry Association, and virtually every governor’s tourism committee or office has a substantial cultural component. In this case, the arts community should be credited with the foresight to convene a meeting, organize a coalition, and issue a report in response to an approaching “window of opportunity.”

At a more local level, the D.C. Preservation League used convenings as a tool to reverse years of neglect with regard to historic properties and landmarks in the nation’s capital. In spite of strong preservation legislation, preservationists found that there was a profound lack of understanding at the highest levels of elected and appointed government

about the value of historic preservation. There was also insufficient training of building inspectors and a lack of budget and staff resources for enforcement. In response to these problems, the League organized a bi-monthly meeting to talk about how to enforce preservation ordinances and laws. These gatherings of local preservationists led to a “Preservation Summit” that produced an action plan for the city. The plan not only included very detailed recommendations for the Council, the mayor and the community, but it served to “embarrass” city officials by holding Washington, D.C. up for comparison with other cities and states where preservation was more fully embraced. In the end, the city used the published report to revise its preservation plan including the creation of a new housing inspector devoted to preservation. In this example, the summit recommendations were specific, targeted at decision makers, and focused more on administrative reform than increased appropriations. Furthermore, the summit was able to use examples from other states and cities in order to call public attention to D.C.’s shortcomings, advance the notion of “neglect,” and change the political calculus for city officials.

In Oregon, the governor organized a statewide cultural summit in 1998 in response to an oversight and planning board’s poll that showed a high percentage of the state’s citizens were disconnected from their local communities. At the summit the governor issued a challenge to the state’s cultural community to develop an ambitious and expansive cultural plan. Through the passage of a special bill in 1999, the governor and legislature then appointed a task force to develop recommendations for increasing public and private investment in culture. The task force was comprised of legislators and citizens and

gathered information and ideas through forums throughout the state. The task force recommendations have been described as a “ready-made” package to be sold to the legislature, and its members were “built-in” advocates. Ultimately, many of the recommendations were adopted, including the creation of the Oregon Cultural Trust, which creates an endowment that will provide a permanent source of funding for cultural developments and the preservation of cultural assets (Dwyer and Frankel 2002). In this case the convenings added legitimacy to a cultural agenda that had the prior support of the governor. In addition, the convenings built on a well-publicized report, linking policy alternatives about art and culture to the newly identified problem of community attachment. This is an example of the “coupling” process described by Kingdon. Finally, the task force served as a platform to recruit and nurture policy entrepreneurs and advocates who became active lobbyists for the implementation of the recommendations.

There are many other examples of policy-relevant convenings at the local, state and national levels. The above cases, we hope, demonstrate that if organized properly, task forces, commissions, summits, forums and working meetings in the cultural sector can help to achieve significant policy results.

### **Where do we go from here?**

Based on our literature review and on discussions with leaders in the field, we believe that foundations, nonprofit organizations, and advocacy groups should think more strategically about how meetings can advance policy. Special forums can help to unify an otherwise fragmented community (as in the case of the art); identify and sharpen a policy problem that needs attention; coordinate and sustain research, analysis and debate around selected alternatives; effectively position the arts to take advantage of both predictable and unpredictable windows of opportunity in the political stream; and effectively link art and culture as avenues for addressing many different public concerns (urban development, quality of life, suburban sprawl, and ethnic and religious divisions, among others.). Moreover, meetings offer a relatively inexpensive way, compared to increased appropriations, for governments at every level to display commitment to the arts. Although some would argue that such initiatives siphon off energy that might be productively applied toward acquiring more funding for the arts, we believe that if organized strategically, convenings can offer a foothold for culture in the larger policy environment.

It is tempting to simply call for the creation of a national blue ribbon commission for the arts, following the long tradition of these commissions or taskforces in such fields as education and health (Wyzomirksi (2000) suggests that a blue ribbon commission could be “created to explore how the arts and cultural activities can help government and society achieve national goals while preserving creative resources and institutions” (103)). In all likelihood, the cultural community is not ready for a high visibility

commission. For it to be effective, a commission must be geared toward producing very practical policy recommendations that address a problem already recognized by decision makers as needing attention. This problem might currently exist, but until there is consensus in the cultural community about the nature of the problem and a short list of possible alternatives, a blue ribbon commission is premature.

Perhaps convenings can be used at the state-level to better coordinate the diverse set of actors and organizations that currently support art and culture. Mark Schuster's (2002) recent pilot, study "Mapping State Cultural Policy", found that there were more than 100 different organizations, agencies and programs that support art and culture in Washington state alone. Typically, attention to cultural policy is directed at state agencies. But Schuster demonstrates that a more complete "map" must include both explicit and implicit policies that are based in culturally-oriented organizations and departments as well as those that have no obvious connection to art and culture (transportation, general administration, housing, etc.). In the education sector, where authority and resources are spread across multiple government departments and throughout civil society, state-level education commissions have been instrumental in coordinating activities across agencies, sectors and levels of government. Similarly, perhaps state-level commissions could be set up with the precise goals of producing a Schuster-like map of cultural policies across the state and recommending strategies for the coordination of resources and programs, thereby, strengthening the infrastructure for art and culture.

This is precisely the type of meeting that Dwyer and Frankel call for in their recent report, “Policy Partners: Making the Case for State Investments in Culture” (2002). The tasks given to commissions should be explicit: 1) map the sector and identify all relevant programs and sources of support; 2) analyze and evaluate the political landscape; and 3) make specific recommendations for how to coordinate efforts within the state government and between the state government and non-profit organizations. There is a risk this process will result in recommendations for mergers or in reforms that will have differential benefits across the field (creating losers and winners). But we need exactly this type of non-advocacy based dialogue and analysis in order to get beyond requests for additional appropriations and to help governments better coordinate and administer cultural assets. In efforts to support art and culture, we must not simply focus on raising the *level* of support, we must also position the *lever* - in other words, policy strategies (including special convenings) should include a focus on leveraging existing resources and support structures.

Finally, is there a problem or public issue that is ripe for a coordinated and well-timed meeting organized the cultural sector? It seems to us that one of the most promising areas for a special task force, summit, or commission that would have a bearing on the cultural sector would be “quality of life” issues. These issues are of increasing concern and interest to local and state politicians. Some state and municipal leaders have already organized task forces to address issues of sprawl, open space, land development, economic development, and environmental protection (see, for example, the New York State Quality Communities Task Force). Where existing convening structures are in

place, the cultural community must work to ensure a prominent place at the table, thereby enlarging the debate and discussion to include *both* the natural and cultural environment. Where such forums are absent, the cultural sector should help to initiate conversations. Again, “quality of life,” while still a somewhat obscure notion, has begun to capture the attention of the general public and decision makers. This is an area where the right “framing of a problem,” the right partnerships and coalitions, and the right set of policy entrepreneurs could effectively join together to place an issue of central importance to the arts, squarely on the government’s agenda.

In sum, we believe that meetings should be viewed as important strategies in the cultural policy tool kit. In this section, we emphasize that the process of organizing a special convening should be no less analytical or astute than any other political strategy.

Organizers need to think carefully about the problem, the existing political landscape, and the best convening structure to accomplish their goals. Should the meeting be commissioned by a government agency? Should it be independent? Should it be funded by private sources? Jointly? Should it be bipartisan? Should it cut across sectors? Should it include experts and citizens or just one or the other? Should it support new research? Should it be limited in duration or ongoing? Should it be established only after elected officials are already softened up and prepared to consider alternatives? Or should it be organized to create momentum for an idea from the start? When would it be most effective? The timing, structure, participants, and the specific mandate for a group can make or break a convening. In an effort to help orient potential conveners to the range of meeting types available to them as they consider options for influencing policy, we have

created a rough typology of approximately 30 different convening structures. In the grid (figure 3, separate appendix), we describe the general purpose of each meeting type, the host, the participants, the products, and the format, and then provide one or two examples from the field. When possible, we draw on examples from the cultural sector. Some of the examples provided are based on existing meetings: others are based on hypothetical cases. The grid is by no means exhaustive. Similarly, the “typology” is rough and necessarily too general, with some overlap between categories and with other categories lumped together. Nonetheless, we believe this is a useful analytical device that provides a snapshot of a heterogeneous policy tool.

Too often in the cultural sector, people organize meetings because they seem to represent the best way to “get started” – to get an idea off the ground, to develop momentum, and to generate “dialogue.” Once it is decided to have a meeting on some general topic, organizers begin to define their goals, assemble participants, and shape the format. Rather than as a starting point in an open-ended process, we recommend that organizers think about meetings as an essential tool throughout the entire policy process. In so doing, they should determine precisely how, where and when a convening or special forum can be most effective, and only then, begin to think about its precise content and design. In the cultural sector, we too often put the cart before the horse, or the meeting before the policy purpose. As a result, the thesis put forth here is that meetings may not be as useful as they could be for advancing cultural policy.

### **CHAPTER 3: Cultural Policy and National Service Associations**

In this chapter we will investigate the nature of and extent to which policy is discussed at the annual meetings of the major national arts service associations. These annual meetings are the principal forums for most practitioners and art leaders to engage in broad-based conversations about the field. While advancing policy is generally not the principal goal of a national association meeting (compared to fostering networks, developing leadership, and providing professional training and education), the executive leadership of these associations have told us that fostering rich and substantive policy dialogue is among their objectives. Therefore, one motivating question for this chapter is, “How do participants at these meetings talk about policy?” Our findings are based on participant observation at eleven annual meetings and several additional special convenings organized by academic centers and foundations.<sup>14</sup> We also held roundtable discussions at the conclusion of each annual meetings with eight to ten participants who were identified by association staff as having a fairly “broad” view of their field and who “think about policy often.”

A second line of inquiry is: “Which issues are most prominently discussed within the culture sector? How often do policy issues appear on the agenda? What is the nature and diversity of participants and speakers? To what extent do issues overlap conferences or disciplines or remain the province of one or another? (And how has this changed over time?)” To answer this second set of questions, we will examine a statistical profile of

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<sup>14</sup> The annual meetings we studied include those organized by the American Association of Museums; the Alliance of Artists Communities; Grantmakers in the Arts; the National Guild of Community Schools of the Arts; the National Trust for Historic Preservation; Opera America; the Association of Arts Presenters;

topics and participants at the annual meetings of seven associations that took place between 1992 and 2000. In so doing, we pay close attention to whether there is significant issue overlap or whether there is policy or issue fragmentation. We conclude this section with a brief summary of the most salient policy issues raised by participants in the roundtable conversations. It is important to point out that in this chapter we are evaluating association meetings by our criteria effectiveness at advancing policy dialogue – not theirs. In other words, these associations typically organize their meetings around other important goals: professional development, leadership training, and networking, to name a few. Nonetheless, national association meetings serve as important forums in the cultural sector, and it is therefore worth investigating the policy dimensions of these gatherings.

## **Talk about policy**

### *The policy ladder*

We attended approximately 20 meetings throughout the cultural sector, and a majority of these were national meetings of arts service associations. At these gatherings we functioned as “policy ethnographers,” paying careful attention to what issues people brought up for discussion and more importantly, how these issues connected to cultural policy. For ten of these meetings, we carefully reviewed and coded our notes from as many policy relevant sessions as we could attend.<sup>15</sup> Essentially, we analyzed each

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the National Association of Latino Arts and Culture; the Western States Folklorist Association; the Theatre Communications Group; and the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies.

<sup>15</sup> We could only attend a fraction of all of the offerings because many of the sessions were coterminous. Rather than choosing a random sample of sessions, we decided to concentrate on those that offered the most promise (based on their program descriptions) for engaging policy concerns. Therefore, we cannot

comment in our notes in terms of a “policy ladder” (see figure 1). Comments were classified into one of ten different stages or “rungs”: simply recognizing important trends, thinking strategically, identifying conditions or problems, suggesting solutions, recognizing policy windows (opportunities to affect policy), building consensus or setting priorities, creating an action plan, and finally, enacting, implementing, and evaluating a policy. (See appendix A for a fuller description of each policy rung.) This is, of course, only one way to characterize the policy making process, but it is useful for the purposes of this research.

Results suggest that participants generally remain on the first three rungs of the ladder - trends, strategic thinking, and problem identification. (see figure 3.2). Of the 400 comments that have been classified thus far, 73 percent, or 291 comments, fall into these three categories (87 comments have been designated as describing trends, 127 as strategic thinking, and 77 as identifying conditions or broad problems). The next “rung” on the ladder – where participants actually propose a possible policy alternative or solution – receives 54 mentions (or 13 percent). Still fewer comments make it to identifying policy opportunities or windows (32 comments), and almost no comments or discussions reach the point of consensus building (setting priorities), action plans, or evaluation and re-design of existing policies. Ideally, more discussions would progress up the policy ladder toward policy solutions, or at least take place at higher rungs on the ladder (As a hypothetical example, see the discussion about immigrant artists presented in figure 3.1).

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generalize our findings to each conference as a whole. We can simply describe how policy was discussed in those sessions where such concerns were most likely to surface.

While recognizing this general finding, there were a few instances when conversations moved up several rungs on the ladder, creating a context that seemed to energize participants and create “break-through” moments in a conference. For example, at a session on new media artists at the Grantmakers in the Arts (GIA) annual meeting, participants lamented the fact that independent filmmakers are often poorly compensated for their films and typically give up important rights to their work (even when the work is funded through PBS). Rather than remain fixed on the problem, several participants suggested that representatives of GIA meet with representatives of Grantmakers in Film and Electronic Media to hammer out a set of recommendations and policies for the funding community that relate to investments in media and film projects (for example, artist fee schedules, copyright issues, etc.). One participant in the discussion agreed to take the next step and convene the appropriate parties.

Similarly, participants at the National Association of Latino Arts and Culture (NALAC) were able to identify a common problem for their community – too few Latino faculty members in fine arts departments at U.S. colleges and universities. Participants felt that “affirmative action” efforts targeted at Latino artists were not effective and expressed frustration with the oft-cited excuse that “there are no qualified Latino faculty” to fill the positions. After the identification of the problem, participants very quickly arrived at a solution, built consensus, and created an action plan. They recommended instituting “recruitment practices report cards” for universities across the nation and assigned responsibility to NALAC staff to carry out the action. The staff agreed to accept responsibility, but not without significant reservations about whether the association had

the time or resources to advance the issue. This situation suggests that attendees may be able to build consensus around policy solutions, and at times, as in the GIA conference, individual participants will volunteer to move the process forward. But often conference attendees will look to a larger authority, in this case the conference organizers, to take responsibility for following up on recommendations. This, of course, raises the question of what role associations should play in bringing to life policy ideas that arise during their meetings.

These and other examples suggest that policy discussion can and does move forward at conferences, but too often it does not. There are many issues vying for attention on lower rungs of the ladder, and only a few are important enough, or sufficiently ripe, to warrant further discussion. The challenge, and the opportunity, facing meeting organizers and facilitators is to identify the right issues, help participants focus on achievable policy solutions, and link the conversation with individuals and structures capable of undertaking further action.

Overall, with only a few exceptions, these findings suggest that we in the arts and culture community are much better at recognizing how our field is changing (trends), what the changes mean for our work (strategic thinking), and what problems result from the changes (identifying problems), than at suggesting specific solutions or outlining plans to address the problems. From a distance it might seem that we more readily embrace a “culture of complaint” than an “attitude of activism.” The proverbial cup seems half empty.

This is not an entirely fair representation. First, the results above are drawn from large, annual meetings of national service associations, where it is less likely than in small, targeted meetings that conversations will move up the ladder from problems to solutions. Furthermore, moving up the ladder is not necessarily a move from complaint to activism, but more accurately from broad discussion to specific thinking. It is much easier for people to talk about policy in general terms than to suggest specific alternatives or opportunities for action. Participants may not have the disposition or experience to look for opportunities to affect policy, to recognize barriers to changing policy, or to suggest alternatives for field-wide action.

Does it matter, from a policy perspective, that most of the arts and culture meetings we analyzed serve principally to air grievances, share concerns, and raise broad questions about the role of the arts in society? In many ways the meetings (especially the annual conferences) resemble Southern-style tent revivals, where “believers” come together to find mutual affirmation and seek the deeper meanings in their work and the world they serve. This is surely an important consequence. But without sacrificing these often intangible benefits, can we also consider ways to use our meetings to design policy alternatives, identify opportunities in the political landscape, debate and deliberate priorities, build consensus, and mobilize constituents?

It is important to acknowledge that policy making and problem solving take place at several levels. We might imagine placing the “policy ladder” against three different

structures – a cottage, a condominium, and a high rise. By “cottage” we mean to encompass the problems and decisions that can be made by the staff and leadership within an organization (how to stabilize revenues, train better volunteers, and develop board leadership). With “condominium” we include concerns that cannot be addressed by a single institution or organization – that is, problems that are community-wide (for example, strengthening the arts in schools, influencing city-planning, and increasing local public spending on the arts). In the condominium policy making or problem solving typically involves collective action. (i.e., any single resident can not unilaterally decide to redecorate the lobby or change the landscaping) The associational meetings we attended generally do a good job of providing participants with the tools needed to fix the roofs over their own cottages, but they are less successful at helping their constituents work together as effective problem solvers in political and community contexts.

Finally, some problems or policies belong in the “high rise,” typically those national in scale, such as federal appropriations, regulation, legislation, litigation, and rule making, as well as policies promulgated by national organizations themselves, such as new codes of conduct or new national grant programs. For the most part, high-rise decisions are made by the owners of the building, not the residents. In other words, this is an elite arena of policy making, where leaders of national organizations and some foundation officers participate in lobbying, building coalitions, testifying, gathering information, and designing programs. Currently, the meetings of national arts service associations are not designed primarily to advance this type of policy, although they can serve the leaders of these groups by providing important information about activities in the field.

## **Talk About Policy: Perspectives from the Roundtable Discussions**

At the conclusion of each conference, we organized a roundtable discussion with eight to ten participants who were identified for us by the staff of each association. Many of the participants were either current or former board members of the national service associations or were otherwise regarded as being leaders in the field. We asked these panels to consider a number of questions, including: 1) what they thought cultural policy consisted of; 2) their perception of how policy gets made in the cultural sector; 3) what they considered to be the barriers to effective policy making; 4) in what forums do policy concerns get discussed; and 5) what are the major policy issues or problems facing the broader arts and culture community. We do not provide a detailed summary of these discussions in this monograph. However, we do identify below a few common policy themes that emerged from our conversations.

### *Top down versus bottom up policy*

There are many different understandings of the notion of “policy.” For some, policy is reflected in the decisions made by national membership associations. For others, foundations and grantmakers set policy. Still others restrict their idea of policy to government funding of the arts at the national, state and local levels. A few people mentioned that cultural policy represented those decisions made by the governing boards of national associations or even individual organizations. Finally, policy was often equated with advocacy.

Within these various definitions was a widespread perception, especially among representatives of local organizations, that policy is top down, that “people in the trenches have little to do with cultural policy,” and that policy is something that happens to them, rather than something they actively help to shape. People remarked that policies are often “handed down from foundations and program officers.”

Because policy is seen as top down, many felt that existing cultural policies often do not adequately meet community needs. In citing an example of an insular, top down policy, a few people mentioned the decision by foundations in the 1980s to begin funding diversity initiatives in the arts. These initiatives were geared toward attracting ethnic minorities to the major cultural institutions (symphonies, museums, and theatres). Such efforts, it was argued, failed to acknowledge that hundreds of smaller minority-based organizations were already reaching significant numbers of people from black and Latino communities. Therefore, reasoned one participant, the intended “cultural policy” actually forced struggling institutions of color to compete with larger established organizations for their own audience base.

*Policy is about big organization*

The concern was raised at several of the conferences that policy continues to cater to large, established organizations to the detriment of the small, rural, unincorporated, or community-based organizations. In one roundtable discussion it was suggested that the “cultural dynasties” (large museums and theatres, ballet and opera companies, and symphony orchestras) still determine policy and that midsize and smaller organizations

are generally not at the table when policy gets discussed. We should stress that people's notions of what is talked about at the mythical cultural policy "table" often are based on vague and ambiguous ideas about the policy process. Interviewees envisioned the cultural policy community as something far more developed and manifest than is truly the case. Nonetheless, they suspected that decisions and agendas are being set without the input of particular disciplines or sub-sectors. Having a voice at the "table," they asserted, is necessary for survival. According to one participant, the vast majority of funding still flows to major institutions. They added that unless the system breaks, the major institutions will continue to receive the bulk of funding, and the smaller organizations will need to invent new ways to fund themselves or become unsustainable. Others expressed concern that the cultural policy research agenda will focus on those institutions easiest to study – again, the larger organizations. This would follow what one participant noted as the "looking for your keys under the lamppost" approach to cultural policy research.

*Funding: getting beyond traditional sources*

It is clear from the roundtable discussions that policy is intimately and most often tied to monetary concerns. As one roundtable participant stated, "where power lies, where wealth is distributed, you will find policy." However, we detected a noticeable shift in interest, if not attention, to non-traditional sources of support for the arts. In particular, people talked about non-appropriation based strategies – for example, securing rehearsal space for artists in unoccupied corporate offices during evening hours; tapping recycling centers for artist materials; or as mentioned earlier, issuing report cards to universities to

highlight their successes and failures at recruiting minority artists into faculty positions. The preservation community is a leader in pursuing non-appropriation based strategies, from smart codes that make it easier to rehabilitate historic properties to the creative “re-use” of historic structures. Perhaps even more important was the growing recognition among roundtable participants of the need to identify and pursue funding sources outside of the cultural sector. It was argued that many federal, state and local government programs and departments provide funding that art organizations and arts-based projects are eligible for. The Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA), administered by the Department of Transportation, was cited as an example. Over the last decade more funding for preservation and heritage has come through Transportation (through enhancement funds set aside by ISTEA) than any other single source. Similarly, participants recognized that important sources of funding may exist in education, housing, health, community development, human services, and a variety of other departments and agencies.

### *The Gilded Ghetto*

The idea of trying to identify resources in other sectors and government departments is part of a larger trend, identified by our discussants, to move cultural concerns outside the “gilded ghetto” – a term used to describe the insular nature of the arts community, their funding structure, and their narrowly conceived public purposes. This led one participant to claim that the term “cultural policy” is itself a barrier, and that we need to move from a notion of cultural policy to one of community policy (from “policy for the arts” to “the arts for public policy”). In addressing this shift in emphasis, roundtable participants

discussed the importance of inter-sectoral partnerships and the need to involve cultural leaders involved in larger issues of community planning. Again, to drive this point home, one participant noted that we need to go from a “silos” to a “systems” approach to cultural policy. In spite of the collective enthusiasm for an expanded approach to cultural policy, it is our impression that most arts leaders (especially at the state and local levels) do not have a concrete understanding of how to get a seat at the larger policy and planning table, nor do they have a well-planned strategy for what to do once they get there.

### *Toolbox Policy*

Another important concept that was raised by roundtable participants was the difference between “toolbox” and “deliberative” policy. Toolbox policy is the set of strategies available to organizations and individuals to help them solve their own problems and concerns. For example, preservation advocates have at their disposal a variety of tools – regulations, tax credits, smart codes, and zoning strategies – to save more effectively old buildings and historic areas. But for these advocates, policy is rarely rooted in larger, field-wide decisions and programs. (By way of contrast, deliberative policy involves identifying shared concerns, questioning existing assumptions, and searching for optimal solutions across multiple stakeholders in a field.) In our conversations with conference participants, people generally felt that annual meetings provided useful forums for exchanging toolbox policy (sharing success stories, swapping best practices in peer group discussions, etc.), but that such meetings were much less successful at encouraging, sustaining, or capitalizing on deliberative policy discussions.

*A Focus on Crafting the Right Message.*

In many of our conversations, we found the tendency for participants to drift from a discussion of policy to a discussion about “the message.” In other words, for many arts advocates, policy is primarily about “telling the story” of why what they do is important. This may result both from a natural inclination to talk about abstract notions of value (perhaps a predisposition of the types of people engaged in the arts sector) and from a feeling of operating at the margins of public life with inadequate resources. Thus, feeling constantly “embattled,” arts professionals are always on guard to defend the value and worth of their enterprise and feel that developing a convincing message is the first step in advancing policy. However, broad-based discussions about what the message should be or how to develop a campaign to change public attitudes about the arts are not very productive without considering the policy context. What is the specific policy opportunity that such “campaigns” seek to influence or advance? There is too much talk about “shifting attitudes” without discussing concrete policy alternatives. In other words, what policy truck are we trying to drive through the changing landscape of opinion?

### **Statistical Profile of Seven Annual Meetings**

In order to draw a more complete picture of the range of topics and participants featured at the annual meetings of national arts service associations, we collected the program books from each of seven conferences for the years 1992, 1996 and 2000. The meetings included in our sample were organized by the American Association of Museums, Opera America, American Symphony Orchestra League, Americans for the Arts, the National

Assembly of State Arts Agencies, Grantmakers in the Arts, and the National Trust for Historic Preservation. We examined a total of 21 conference programs and more than 1,100 conference sessions. For each session we documented information about the topic and the participants (from the session descriptions available in the conference books).

First, we wanted to know which topic areas were discussed most frequently by professionals in the arts community between 1992 and 2000. Our analysis reveals that 280 of the 1,100 conference sessions reviewed focused on *internal management* issues. This represents 25 percent of all conversations. This should come as no surprise given that a primary goal of these national service associations, and of their annual meetings, is to provide members with tools to strengthen their individual organizations and to hone their skills as professionals and managers. When we look at the 40 other topic areas, spanning a wide variety of issues within the sector, we find a great deal of dispersion. (see table 1). In other words, few topics dominate the agenda. *Arts and heritage education* led all topics, discussed in 11.5 percent of the sessions (81 sessions). Other areas that received prominent attention were *technology, audience development, grants and philanthropy, and strategic partnerships*. When we aggregate our topics into 15 broad issue areas, we see again significant dispersion across areas (table 2).<sup>16</sup>

It is also interesting to examine which associations concentrated on which issue areas. (table 3). While *management issues* generally dominate the agendas of all the national meetings in our sample, the associations that represent nonprofit arts organizations

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<sup>16</sup> Note the high frequency of “preservation-related” issues reflects the fact that virtually all the NTHP conference sessions dealt with preservation.

(symphonies, opera companies, and museums) were much more likely to talk about management concerns (which are of immediate relevance to their everyday work) than those associations representing public and private grantmakers, who typically focused on broader issues such as *arts in communities*.

In chapter 2, we discussed how the cultural policy community is fragmented. A fragmented community implies that, in general, people are talking about a variety of issues rather than a select few “high priority” items. There are many different agendas, with each sub-field focusing on its own set of priorities. One way to examine fragmentation is to look at “issue overlap” and “issue salience.” The first refers to the extent to which an area of interest is regularly discussed across sub-fields and sectors (symphonies, operas, museums, and grantmakers). That is, does an issue show up on multiple agendas? Salience refers to the frequency with which an issue is discussed across all conferences. Our sample of 1,100 conference sessions allows us to examine the extent of fragmentation in the community. Table 3 suggests that there are only a handful of issues that have both high overlap and high salience. One such issue is *audience development and participation*, which was discussed by every association and which represented between 5 and 10 percent of all conversations across the board (the only exception being the National Trust for Historic Preservation). Similarly, the issue of *arts education* has relatively high overlap and salience.

To get a better sense of the degree to which the cultural sector has coalesced around a set of specific concerns, we disaggregate our issue areas and look more closely at the 40

special topics. The last column in table 1 contains what we are calling a “consensus index,” and it represents the product of how often each association discussed an issue (the percentage of sessions dedicated to a topic).<sup>17</sup> The index is a rough measure of both the overlap and the salience of a topic. To understand the scale of this measure, consider a scenario where 6 different associations each address a topic area in 10 percent of their conference sessions (fairly high visibility and overlap). This topic area would receive a 7.0 on our index, indicating that it is emerging as a consensus agenda item. A negative number indicates higher fragmentation, or lack of attention to an issue across the field. For this part of the analysis, we calculate the index based on the 6 associations that are most directly involved in the arts and exclude the National Trust for Historic Preservation (the issues facing preservationists are sufficiently different that to include this group would exaggerate the degree of fragmentation in the cultural sector).

Table 1 shows that a handful of topic areas receive sustained attention across disciplines. In particular, issues surrounding *technology*, *grants and philanthropy*, *strategic partnerships*, *art and community life*, and *art and heritage in the schools* appear as the most central concerns for this group of cultural professionals (at least as represented by the agendas of annual meetings). However, issues such as *at-risk youth*, *amateur art*, *economic impact* and *art and social activism* receive negative index scores (between –7.69 and –5.22). This indicates that there is little agreement across the community that these issues deserve significant attention. Without a more systematic comparison with other fields, it is hard to know whether our data reveal a highly fragmented policy field or

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<sup>17</sup> The formula for the “consensus index” is as follows:  $\text{Ln}(\%I_1C_1 * \%I_1C_2 * \%I_1C_3 \dots * 10^9)$ ; where I=Issue and C=Conference; and  $\%I_1C_1$  = the percent of sessions in conference 1 that issue 1 was discussed; and Ln =

one that is more integrated. Much depends on the breadth and aggregation of categories included in the analysis.<sup>18</sup> A tentative conclusion is that the cultural community is still tied to many of the more entrenched areas of concern (grantmaking and arts education), while newer policy areas (international issues and globalization; civic dialogue; commercial and nonprofit interaction; and economic issues) remain less prominent. Of course broad categories such as *strategic partnerships* and *arts and community life* (both of which score high on the consensus index) might cover concepts and approaches that are new and important in terms of advancing a common policy agenda.

So far we have examined how topics and issues in the cultural sector are dispersed across associational meetings. But how does attention to these issues change over time? By examining weighted frequencies for each of our 40 topic areas in 1992, 1996 and 2000 separately, we can determine, albeit roughly, which issues are rising and which are falling on the agendas of these associations. (See table 4). As might be expected, focus on the federal cultural agencies has seen a modest decline since the early 1990s, when the embattled NEA was the focus of significant political debate. Similarly, discussions related to *advocacy* – which is often linked to support for the national endowments—has also waned. Somewhat to our surprise (given the thrust of many informal discussions we had with conference participants), focus on *art and community life* as well as *community*

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natural logarithm.

<sup>18</sup> It is no surprise that the index is higher for broader topic areas (like technology) where different approaches to technology all get lumped together and therefore show up on multiple agendas (as compared to a topic like “at-risk youth,” which is much more specific).

*development* has not increased over the years, but has, in fact, shown modest declines.<sup>19</sup> Equally surprising, *art and heritage in schools* (arts education), while still a dominant issue, has seen a 33 percent decline since 1996.

Nevertheless, several issues received more prominent attention in 2000 than in the previous decade. For example, there appears to be an increasing interest in *artistic excellence and quality*, perhaps as a reaction to some of the more utilitarian arguments for the arts that have been popular since the early 1990s. We also see increases in the sessions geared toward *technology* and *Web-based communication* strategies, and growing interest in *leadership development* (and succession). This latter trend may reflect the fact that many of the founding directors of the nonprofits that blossomed during the 1970s and early 1980s are looking ahead to retirement and are concerned that a new generation of leaders might not be prepared to succeed them.

Finally, we can look not only at the topics of conversation, but also at the extent to which panels are designed explicitly with policy concerns in mind and whether the conversation is focused outward on local, state or national concerns or inward on organizational needs and interests. Table 5 shows that 1992 featured the most conference sessions explicitly on policy (5.1 percent of all sessions). This figure dropped to 2.7 percent in 1996 and rose to 4.5 percent in 2000. Given the recent investment by several foundations, academic centers, and policy institutes to build an infrastructure for cultural policy, it is disappointing that explicit policy conversations do not play a more prominent role at

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<sup>19</sup> See our discussion later in this chapter where we document “community building” as an important theme raised in roundtable discussions.

national meetings. Yet we do see a rise in policy discussions since 1996, and we might expect a lag between initial investments in cultural policy (the late 1990s) and its appearance on conference schedules. If we update our analysis with conference information from 2002, we might well find an even greater increase in policy focused sessions. Lastly, table 6 indicates that conference participants are less likely over time to talk about issues that deal with local, state and national concerns and more likely to consider internal organizational matters (a focus that rises from 44 percent of all conference sessions in 1992 to 57 percent in 2000). Again, this trend that associational meetings are increasingly focused on helping their members meet organizational and administrative needs, with larger field-wide concerns less visible, although still important.

In addition to the range of issues discussed at annual meetings, we also consider the profile of speakers and panelists. Who are we inviting to our meetings? Who do we turn to for ideas and information? How does this differ across associations and over time? Table 7 shows that the vast majority of all speakers and panelists represent nonprofit organizations and that most of these are from arts-based nonprofits (both presenting and non-presenting organizations). Americans for the Arts and the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (who collectively represent local and state granting agencies) are the only associations that draw heavily on government officials as conference speakers. In fact, government representatives are visibly absent from the programs of the major presenting arts associations (opera and symphonies), Grantmakers in the Arts, and the American Association of Museums. Researchers and scholars, along with artists,

comprise a relatively consistent, but small proportion (5-8 percent) of the participant pool at most meetings. (It is interesting to note that artists are better represented at the meeting of grantmakers compared to any other association meeting). From our perspective it appears that, associations look to their own backyards when searching for speakers and panelists. In addition, if we look at trends over time (table 8), we find a decrease in the number of representatives from government and in the number of non-arts related nonprofit speakers. However, we do see a trend toward inclusion of more researchers and scholars, more commercial organizations, and slightly more artists. Yet, overall, the field has seen a decrease in the proportion of conference sessions featuring speakers from outside the cultural sector – from a high of 40 percent in 1992 to a low of 25 percent in 1996 and (29 percent in 2000). In spite of the frequent rhetoric by cultural leaders of imploring arts advocates to build bridges and make connections to other sectors and fields, it appears that, at least in terms speakers at the large annual meetings, we are increasingly drawing from within rather than from outside the arts.

### **Issues and Problems: A Qualitative Look at the Arts and Culture Agenda**

Chapter two discussed the importance of the “problem stream” in the policy making process. In order to be considered seriously by decision makers, policy solutions must be linked to clearly defined problems, and there should be consensus by experts and the public regarding the nature and urgency of the problem and the consequences of inaction. It is important to point out the difference between problems and conditions. Kingdon (1995) writes: “There is a difference between a condition and a problem. We put up with all manner of conditions every day; bad weather, unavoidable and untreatable illnesses,

pestilence, poverty. As one lobbyist said, ‘If you only have four fingers on one hand, that’s not a problem; that’s a situation.’ Conditions become defined as problems when we come to believe we should do something about them” ((109). From our discussions with leaders in the cultural sector, it is clear that the cultural community is more likely to discuss issues and concerns than policy-focused problems.

For example, at the meetings we studied, participants might bring up the issue of increasing financial pressures on mid-sized arts organizations. However, in order to cast this **issue** as a **problem**, the conversation needs reframing as follows: “Mid-sized performing arts organizations are facing financial strains, forcing many to close their doors. Existing government support programs are slow to redirect resources to these vulnerable organizations. This is leading to increasing levels of unemployment among second-tier professional artists, who spend most of their productive careers at these institutions. These artists are critical to the arts infrastructure in this country, including America’s most prestigious symphonies, theatres, and opera companies.” Here the problem is recast as one of “unemployment.” The point is that the framing of a problem must implicitly (if not explicitly) answer the questions, “who cares? (whose problem is this?)” and “so what?” (what are the consequences?).

Carroll Joynes, Executive Director, of the Program in Cultural Policy at the University of Chicago’s Harris School, also concludes, in a private correspondence, that problems are largely absent from the cultural policy agenda. In talking with students at the Harris School about cultural policy, he finds that “many come to the School to discuss and learn

about serious social issues [problems] and how to address them – child welfare, the environment, health care, care for the aged, and so on. Arts and culture, or cultural policy issues, strike them as ‘non problems’ by comparison. While issues in the cultural sector are interesting and perhaps worthwhile [in terms of study and research], they still do not see what the pressing problems are that need addressing – that is, arts and culture seem to be doing fine.” He adds, “What would happen – what would the negative consequences be – if there were no cultural policy field and no research being done in the cultural sector?” This remains, we believe, one of the biggest challenges facing the development of the cultural policy community – identifying agreed upon problems and clearly articulating the consequences resulting from the failure to address these problems.

In chapter 2 we described Kingdon’s approach to identifying issues and problems that were high on the agenda of a policy field. He interviewed more than one hundred policy actors in a particular domain (transportation and health) and asked them simply, “What are the main problems that you are occupied with these days?” While we were unable to replicate this method, we did interview approximately 100 arts leaders and professionals through a series of roundtable discussions at a dozen meetings and conferences throughout the cultural sector. Like Kingdon, we asked these groups, “What are the policy issues or concerns facing the broader arts community as well as those facing your particular discipline?” However, unlike the areas that Kingdon studied, where most people in the field recognized a handful of common problems, we did not find much consensus. It is hard to identify what is clearly on the “agenda” for cultural policy actors.

That said, there were a few issues and concerns which were mentioned often enough to merit, perhaps, pre-agenda status – that is, issues that have some resonance throughout the community, but are not, perhaps, identified consistently as one of three or four major areas of concern. These include:

**Testing.** Concern was raised that the arts will become even more marginalized as educational policy increasingly focuses on standards and testing.

**Leadership.** Across disciplines people are pre-occupied with the question of who will be the next generation of nonprofit arts leaders.

**Individual participation.** Several participants raised the issue of individual participation in art-making activity, suggesting that “people today are not doing creative things as often.”

**Trust and elitism.** There was some concern about cultural institutions losing the trust of their audiences and communities. This was connected with the themes raised in the *American Canvas* report about the arts being perceived as elitist.

**Arts ecology.** A common theme was that small-and-medium-sized cultural institutions face special challenges in the coming decades and will increasingly have trouble competing with the large, elite organizations and the very small, “unincorporated” art groups. Moreover, there was concern that non-traditional and marginal art forms (folk art, immigrant art, certain types of popular culture) were not well served by current cultural policies.

**Information commons and intellectual property.** There is a growing awareness that arts and culture must grapple with intellectual property issues. Some participants talk about the loss of the “information commons” (material in the public domain that can be freely used by artists and educators); others worry that new technologies will make it easier for people to “steal” an artist’s copyrighted material.

**Affordable artist space.** Concern was raised about escalating real estate prices, and the challenges posed to artists in finding housing and studio space.

**Barriers to exchange.** Participants discussed globalization and the need to foster international dialogue and cultural exchange. However, because of labor contracts, visa issues, and other immigration policies, it is increasingly difficult for artists to travel and work in foreign countries and for foreign artists to work in the United States.

**Commercialization and commodification.** Many participants lamented the blurring of the boundary between nonprofit and commercial enterprises and activities. They felt that commercial interests and corporate sponsorship were influencing artistic decisions and having negative (though difficult to specify) consequences on the cultural sector. (People mentioned, for example, recent museum exhibitions of corporate collections, such as Saatchi, Armani, and Versace.)

**Preservation and heritage.** There is diffuse concern about various aspects of preservation and the need to pay greater attention to the care of important cultural artifacts. Many people worried about the unique preservation challenges posed by digitalization.

**Quality of life.** Participants often raised quality of life issues when talking about the arts. More specifically, many people felt that quality of life issues were becoming more important to citizens (in response to longer work hours, traffic and congestion, and sprawl) and that the arts can be major assets for communities that are seeking to make improvements in this area.

**Barriers to access.** Several people felt that the challenges facing people living in rural communities in terms of access to cultural institutions and events deserved more attention.

Finally, we should acknowledge that the issue of “community building,” while not framed as a problem, was prominently featured in virtually every roundtable discussion and was well represented in the conference sessions that we attended. In fact, Jim Smith, consultant to the Getty Trust and an early supporter of the cultural policy movement,

argues that community building has become the *zeitgeist* or the defining metaphor, for public debate in this country. In the 1930s the defining notion was security (national security and social security); in the 1950s it was development and economic regeneration (post-war). Now, it is community building, and the cultural sector has clearly joined the bandwagon.<sup>20</sup> For example, preservationists cast their efforts in terms of strengthening communities rather than simply saving old buildings; schools of the arts talk about improving the “quality of life” in communities, rather than simply training children to excel in the arts; and museums talk about building social capital and trust instead of collecting, preserving and displaying art and culture. In fact, the keynote speaker at the American Association of Museums (AAM) annual meeting in 2000 (where the conference theme was “spirit of community”) was author Robert Putnam, who emphasized the role that museums can play in generating social bonds and civic renewal. Most people with whom we spoke were convinced by Putnam’s argument and felt that social capital and civic engagement represented a new *raison d’etre* for the museum community. This was echoed in the roundtable discussion at the AAM, where participants emphasized that arts leaders should think in terms of “community policy” rather than “cultural policy.”

Similarly, in the roundtable discussion at the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies, participants discussed that “case-making” to public officials will now have to rely on community or citizen needs, instead of the needs of artists and arts organizations.

Participants in the Orchestra Forum meeting, sponsored by the Andrew Mellon

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<sup>20</sup> Note: Smith raised this issue at the Grantmakers in the Arts conference in 2000 – well before the September 11 tragedy, which has arguably shifted the debate back to issues of “security.”

Foundation, noted that musicians must exert leadership not only within their respective organizations, but in their communities as well (as educators, community ambassadors, and spokespersons). In discussing “risk taking”, one participant at the forum noted, “It is the community that must have the vision, not just the orchestra!”

The notion of community building – using the arts as community assets – is clearly on the agenda of cultural professionals and policy makers, but it is not represented as a problem connected to a set of policy alternatives. Instead, it is simply a “big idea” that influences how organizations and individuals in the cultural sector conceive of and approach their missions and their audiences.

**Figure 3.1: The policy ladder and immigrant artists: an example of a community-level discussion.**

	<b>Stages</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Examples</b>
1	Trend	Participants call attention to broad, field-wide trends.	“There are a growing number of immigrants in our community, many of whom bring with them very rich artistic traditions.”
2	Strategic Thinking	Participants ask general questions about how to change the environment in which they work and how to influence broad trends.	“We need to do a better job of building bridges to new immigrant communities, and the arts are an effective way to do so.”
3	Concerns and Problem Identification	Participants raise a field-wide, or community-wide problem or grievance.	“Immigrant artists are not adequately supported in most communities. They do not have access to existing sources of funding because of language barriers and because existing grant categories don’t recognize immigrant art forms.”
4	Policy Solutions	Participants suggest specific policy alternatives that address problems or flesh out a recommended strategy.	“Arts organizations, grantmakers and local human service providers should supply technical assistance to help immigrant artists apply for grants and gain access to community resources. The arts community should work with local universities to identify experts who can help evaluate and interpret unfamiliar immigrant art forms.”
5	Policy Windows and Barriers	Participants identify specific opportunities (or barriers) for policy action – new legislation, rule making, an important meeting or summit, the release of a report, or a press conference – where a proposed alternative might find leverage and gain visibility.	“Our mayor has just created a taskforce on immigrant affairs (TIA). Support structures for immigrant artists should be high on their agenda.” Or, “The state has just implemented a new curriculum guideline emphasizing multi-cultural education. This is a good opportunity to connect immigrant artists with the schools.”
6	Consensus Building/Priority Setting	Participants attempt to narrow in on a particular policy alternative or set priorities for action.	“Rather than push for new appropriations or grants, we should focus on technical assistance and other strategies to help these artists tap into existing resources.”
7	Action Plan – Assigning Responsibilities	Participants begin to outline the necessary steps to get a policy solution onto the agenda of a decision-making body and/or implemented.	A participant agrees to hold a meeting to bring together local arts leaders and residents of immigrant communities to discuss the cultural needs of these groups. Another participant agrees to contact the new chair of the TIA.
8	Policy Enactment	Policy advocates are successful at getting a proposed solution funded, enacted into law, or otherwise embedded into policy.	A meeting is held of arts leaders and immigrant artists. A technical assistance program is designed by a coalition of local organizations.
9	Policy Implementation	Stakeholders put into practice the approved program, project or policy.	The technical assistance program is implemented. Immigrant artists successfully apply for grants. Several exhibitions and performances take place.
10	Evaluation and Re-design	Principals and stakeholders seek to evaluate the success of a new policy and make decisions about its future direction.	Members of the TIA meet to discuss whether the technical assistance program was successful. They discuss other barriers to fully integrating immigrant arts into the community.

## Appendix A

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*Trends:* Participants call attention to broad, field-wide trends (trends that may have either negative or positive consequences). For example, “in opera, more and more companies are developing and presenting new works, as opposed to staging traditional fare;” or “trends show that mid-size presenting arts organizations are in greater financial difficulty than either large or small non-profit organizations.”

*Strategic Thinking:* Participants ask general questions about how to change the environment in which they work and how to influence broad trends (e.g., “How can we use the internet to change perceptions of opera and build new audiences?” and “How do we convince parents or guidance counselors that pursuing a career in the arts is an acceptable choice?”) Often strategic thinking involves discussion about how to frame public discourse about the arts. For example, “We need to shift the discourse about arts education from simply improving test scores to creating habits of the mind.” Finally, strategic thinking might include general comments about the need to build stronger alliances and coalitions (without any mention of a specific policy target for such alliances and coalitions). An example, would be: “arts education advocates need to form a closer alliance with groups concerned about literacy.”

*Concerns and Problem Identification:* Participants raise a field-wide problem or grievance. They identify a trend, condition, tension, or barrier that has a negative impact on their ability to fulfill their missions or that has an adverse effect on artists, arts organizations, audiences or artworks. For example, “the commodification of nonprofit arts is putting pressure on artistic decisions and changing audience experience;” or “overnight deadlines are negatively impacting the quality of arts journalism.” It is important to emphasize that problems must be “field-wide” to be considered in this category and not specific to a particular organization (for example, if a participant states, “The arts community suffers from a lack of new leadership at the board level,” we would include this; on the other hand, we would exclude the following statement, “Our theater is having trouble recruiting new board members. What can we do?”).

*Policy Alternative :* Participants think about broad strategies and suggest specific policy alternatives that will address those problems or flesh out a recommended strategy. Instead of simply raising the problem of the commercial influence on nonprofit arts, a participant might recommend that “the major national service associations convene an interdisciplinary task force to suggest voluntary, field-wide standards for acknowledging corporate sponsors.” Or, rather than simply suggesting that the arts education community form stronger connections with the literacy movement, a participant might recommend that, “we identify existing literacy taskforces or commissions at the state level, and lobby the appropriate state official to appoint a member of the arts community to serve on those groups.”

*Policy Opportunities or Windows:* Participants identify specific opportunities for policy action – new legislation, rule making, an important meeting or summit, the release of a report, or a press conference – where a proposed alternative might find leverage or gain visibility.. For example, “the nonprofit arts community should organize and build a coalition to influence upcoming tax treaties or tax legislation.” Or, “next year, the arts community should be prepared to argue against the DMCA when the Copyright and Patent Office holds its bi-annual rulemaking.” Or, “the annual Conference of Mayors is an opportunity to promote preservation-friendly policies that contribute to downtown development.”

*Policy Barriers:* Participants raise concerns about impediments to policy action; unlike substantive problems (as discussed above), these concerns focus on process. For example, a participant might draw attention to the fact that a certain type of advocacy is likely to be ineffective without better supporting research and data. Another might suggest that established grant categories (both at foundations and public agencies) make it difficult for organizations to support “indigenous” art forms. Yet another might point out that the decision making structure of state departments of transportation impedes citizens to who seek to promote historic preservation in the face of large transportation projects.

*Consensus Building; Selecting a Solution; Setting Priorities:* At this stage participants attempt to focus on a particular policy alternative, often connected to an identified policy opportunity. For example, of the many alternatives for building arts audiences, a participant might suggest that “the very first thing that must be done to increase participation is to secure subsidies to bring school groups to see live performances.” Often, these comments are preceded by, “Our priority should be.” It is often difficult to distinguish between *proposing an alternative* and *selecting a solution*. The latter, however, is

typically more conclusive – where a participant will actually propose moving forward with a suggestion or policy. Selecting a solution typically occurs in small gatherings or among the executive leadership of an organization (not at annual conference sessions). Nonetheless, occasionally a conference session will focus on an already agreed upon strategy or policy, using the session as an opportunity to enlist support and to raise awareness of the policy. In these cases we would label comments (or groups of comments) as “consensus building.”

*Action Plan – Assigning Responsibility:* At this stage participants actually begin to outline the necessary steps to get a policy solution onto the agenda of a decision-making body and/or enacted or implemented. For example, a meeting participant might volunteer to convene a taskforce, contact an official, draft a press release, circulate a petition, organize grantmakers, design a new program, commission research, draft common standards or protocols, etc. This type of conversation only takes place in smaller gatherings when important decision makers are at the table – that is, officials or managers of organizations who have the capacity to delegate responsibility, assign resources, or influence opinion leaders.

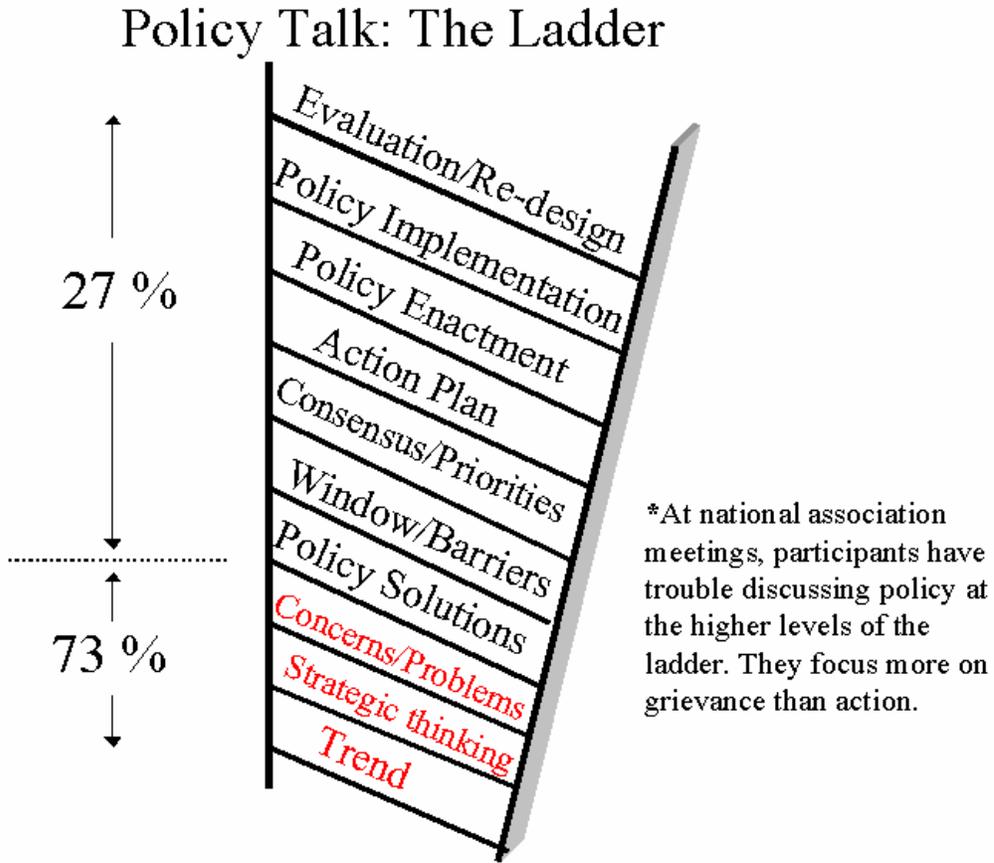
*Policy Enactment:* This does not characterize a unique stage of discourse or conversation, but rather represents the point at which policy advocates are successful in getting a proposed solution funded, enacted into law, or otherwise embedded into policy.

*Policy Implementation:* Policy implementation follows enactment. It is where the rubber hits the roads and officials, program officers, and arts managers put into practice the approved program, project or policy. During implementation, new policies often create unintended consequences, face unexpected barriers to action, and engender new and unforeseen partnerships. The trials and tribulations of the policy implementation process are not the topic of conversation at conferences or other public or semi-private gatherings. Such conversations take place among project team members.

*Evaluation and re-design:* This is the final stage in the policy making process where the principals and stakeholders seek to evaluate the success of a new policy and decide about its future direction. There are multiple ways to evaluate a project or policy – informal feedback loops, formal program evaluation, cost-benefit analysis, focus groups, public opinion polls, attendance records, time-to-production assessments, etc. Typically evaluation and re-design do not take place in a general conference setting, although certain meetings or taskforces might be established with the expressed purpose of evaluating an existing policy or program (e.g., the recent Steering Committee on the Future of the Fulbright Educational Exchange Program, hosted by the National Humanities Center). Occasionally, a general conference session will be developed in order to elicit feedback from participants about a particular policy or program. For the purposes of this study, if participants offered advice or comments about the success or failure of an established policy, we classify these comments in the category of “evaluation and re-design.”

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Figure 3.2: The Policy Ladder and National Service Association Meetings



**Table 1: Frequency for each topic area (across all conferences and years)**  
 (note: topics relating to management have been removed for this analysis)

<b>Topic Areas</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Consensus Index</b>
Advocacy	34	4.8	3.56
Amateur arts	4	0.6	-6.74
Artistic excellence and quality	18	2.6	-1.05
Arts and business	2	0.3	-4.18
Arts and civic dialogue	2	0.3	-7.69
Arts and community life – general	33	4.7	6.47
Arts and heritage in the schools (arts education)	81	11.5	7.73
Arts and social activism	6	0.9	-4.51
At-risk youth	2	0.3	-7.69
Audience development	40	5.7	4.47
Community development and urban revitalization	16	2.3	-4.52
Creation of new work/innovation	33	4.7	2.98
Creative re-use of buildings	8	1.1	NA
Cultural exchange	3	0.4	-4.11
Cultural planning/blueprints	7	1	-4.75
Demographic trends	13	1.9	1.6
Diversity (audiences and art forms)	36	5.1	2.6
Economic impact	5	0.7	-5.22
Federal and state stewardship	8	1.1	NA
Federal government (NEA or NEH- other agencies)	20	2.8	0.72
Financial stabilization (e.g. auxiliary issues)	12	1.7	2.94
Grants/Philanthropy	36	5.1	7.77
Heritage/Preservation/Archives	11	1.6	-2.9
Historic site management	14	2	-6.18
Housing issues	2	0.3	-6.52
International issues (e.g. globalization)	16	2.3	-2.74
Leadership development	14	1.2	-0.06
Legal concerns	41	3.6	0.78
Life-long learning	3	0.4	-4.41
National registry	4	0.6	NA
NonProfit/ForProfit	7	1	-4.65
Non-Urban arts	8	0.7	-2.5
Preservation techniques and design	29	4.1	NA
Public art	2	0.3	-6.14
Real estate and financing	6	0.9	NA
Regulations/Smart codes	3	0.4	NA
Strategic partnerships	47	6.7	8.28
Support for individual artists	18	2.6	2.65
Technology (general)	52	7.4	7.04
Tourism	14	2	-2.92
Transportation	5	0.7	NA
Visitor or audience experience (enhancement)	26	3.7	-0.5
Web-based communications	21	3	1.79
Zoning/historic districts	21	3	NA
<b>Total</b>	<b>702</b>	<b>100</b>	

**Table 2: Frequency for each issue area (across all conferences and years)**  
 (note: issues relating to internal management have been removed)

<b>Issue Area</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Amateur Art</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0.6</b>
<b>Artists, Artworks and Architecture</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>7.3</b>
<b>Arts Education</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>12.0</b>
<b>Audiences and Participation</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>11.5</b>
<b>Culture and Community</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>7.4</b>
<b>Diversity</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>5.1</b>
<b>Economics and Culture</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>5.3</b>
<b>Funding and Grants</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>9.7</b>
<b>Globalization and Exchange</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>2.7</b>
<b>Nonprofit-Commercial Interaction</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>1.0</b>
<b>Partnerships</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>6.7</b>
<b>Politics and Advocacy</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>4.8</b>
<b>Preservation</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>15.5</b>
<b>Technology</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>10.4</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>702</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 3: Frequency of Issue Areas Discussed by Each Association**

	<i>Artists and Artworks</i>	<i>Culture and Community</i>	<i>Audiences and Participation</i>	<i>Management</i>	<i>Technology</i>	<i>Arts Education</i>	<i>Funding and Grants</i>	<i>Politics and Advocacy</i>	<i>Globalization and Exchange</i>	<i>Diversity</i>	<i>Economics and Culture</i>	<i>Preservation</i>	<i>Partnerships</i>	<i>Amateur Art</i>	<i>Nonprofit and For Profit</i>	<i>total</i>
NASAA	1	4	4	18	6	7	5	2	4	1	3	0	4	0	0	59
	0.02	0.07	0.07	0.31	0.10	0.12	0.08	0.03	0.07	0.02	0.05	0.00	0.07	0.00	0.00	1.00
Americans For the Arts	3	8	5	18	9	8	8	8	1	6	3	3	5	1	3	89
	0.03	0.09	0.06	0.20	0.10	0.09	0.09	0.09	0.01	0.07	0.03	0.03	0.06	0.01	0.03	1.00
AmSymphony Orchestra League	9	2	12	80	4	21	5	0	0	2	0	1	2	0	1	139
	0.06	0.01	0.09	0.58	0.03	0.15	0.04	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.01	1.00
Opera America	5	1	7	50	10	8	11	2	0	2	0	0	6	0	1	103
	0.05	0.01	0.07	0.49	0.10	0.08	0.11	0.02	0.00	0.02	0.00	0.00	0.06	0.00	0.01	1.00
Grantmakers in the Arts	1	4	3	4	4	0	7	1	0	0	1	0	3	1	0	29
	0.03	0.14	0.10	0.14	0.14	0.00	0.24	0.03	0.00	0.00	0.03	0.00	0.10	0.03	0.00	1.00
American Association of Museums	16	22	47	174	36	36	28	9	10	15	12	30	19	0	2	456
	0.04	0.05	0.10	0.38	0.08	0.08	0.06	0.02	0.02	0.03	0.03	0.07	0.04	0.00	0.00	1.00
National Trust for Historic Preservation	16	11	3	31	4	4	4	12	4	10	18	75	8	2	0	202
	0.08	0.05	0.01	0.15	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.06	0.02	0.05	0.09	0.37	0.04	0.01	0.00	1.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>375</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>1077</b>

**Table 4: Frequency of Topic Area Over Time**

Topic Area	Weighted Frequencies		
	1992	1996	2000
Advocacy	15	10	10
Amateur arts	1	2	1
Artistic excellence and quality	3	6	8
Arts and business	0	0	2
Arts and civic dialogue	1	0	1
Arts and community life– general	13	13	8
Arts and heritage in the schools (arts education)	31	31	20
Arts and social activism	1	1	4
At-risk youth	0	1	1
Audience development	17	11	13
Community development and urban revitalization	5	8	3
Creation of new work/innovation	8	18	6
Creative re-use of buildings	1	5	2
Cultural exchange	1	1	1
Cultural planning/blueprints	2	5	0
Demographic trends	5	4	5
Diversity	23	4	12
Economic impact	5	0	1
Federal and state stewardship	1	1	6
Federal government (NEA or NEH - other agencies)	9	5	6
Financial stabilization (e.g. auxiliary issues)	6	5	1
Grants/Philanthropy	13	10	14
Heritage/ Preservation/Archives	6	3	3
Historic site management	2	5	7
Housing issues	0	1	1
Individual artists (support structures)	7	5	7
International issues (e.g. globalization)	8	3	6
Law and legal concerns (e.g. tax issues, copyright)	9	21	10
Leadership development	3	3	8
Life-long learning	1	1	1
Management (internal)	92	95	96
National registry	1	3	0
NonProfit/ForProfit	0	4	3
Non-Urban Arts (e.g. rural/suburb)	2	4	2
Preservation techniques and design	11	6	12
Program evaluation	16	15	10
Public art	1	0	1
Real estate and financing	0	4	2
Regulations/Smart codes	1	1	1
Strategic partnerships	17	11	20
Technology (general)	13	16	24
Tourism	3	6	4
Transportation	1	2	2
Visitor or audience experience (enhancement)	8	9	9
Web-based communications	1	8	11
Zoning/historic districts	6	8	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>372</b>	<b>372</b>	<b>372</b>

**Table 5: Explicit Mention of Policy by Year**

Year	Policy mentioned explicitly		Total
	No/%	Yes/%	
1992	318	17	335
	0.949	0.051	1.00
1996	404	11	415
	0.973	0.27	1.00
2000	361	17	378
	0.955	0.045	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>1083</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>1128</b>
	<b>0.96</b>	<b>0.04</b>	<b>1.00</b>

**Table 6: Level of Discussion by Year**

Level of Discussion	Year		Total
	1992/%	2000/%	
Community Level	74	67	217
	0.26	0.20	0.22
State Level	16	9	36
	0.06	0.03	0.04
National Level	21	19	62
	0.08	0.06	0.06
Combination of Above	47	47	147
	0.17	0.14	0.15
Organizational Level	122	192	519
	0.44	0.57	0.53
<b>Total</b>	<b>280</b>	<b>334</b>	<b>981</b>
	<b>1.00</b>	<b>1.00</b>	<b>1.00</b>

**Table 7: Frequency of Participant Background by Association**

	<i>Federal Govt</i>	<i>State Govt</i>	<i>Local Govt</i>	<i>Researcher-Author</i>	<i>Arts Nonprofit (non-presenting)</i>	<i>Arts Nonprofit (presenting)</i>	<i>Other Nonprofit</i>	<i>Commerical Organization</i>	<i>Artist</i>	<b>Total</b>
NASAA	22	78	10	14	10	2	31	13	20	200
	0.11	0.39	0.05	0.07	0.05	0.01	0.16	0.07	0.10	1.00
Americans For the Arts	11	13	71	17	10	5	39	46	14	226
	0.05	0.06	0.31	0.08	0.04	0.02	0.17	0.20	0.06	1.00
American Symphony Orchestra League	6	1	8	26	1	277	23	46	25	413
	0.01	0.00	0.02	0.06	0.00	0.67	0.06	0.11	0.06	1.00
Opera America	5	0	3	8	2	139	41	42	13	253
	0.02	0.00	0.01	0.03	0.01	0.55	0.16	0.17	0.05	1.00
Grantmakers in the Arts	0.00	3	5	11	24	12	37	7	20	119
	0.00	0.03	0.04	0.09	0.20	0.10	0.31	0.06	0.17	1.00
American Association of Museums	61	9	20	124	979	9	324	194	2	1722
	0.04	0.01	0.01	0.07	0.57	0.01	0.19	0.11	0.00	1.00
National Trust for Historic Preservation	35	52	72	53	25	0	312	139	2	690
	0.05	0.08	0.10	0.08	0.04	0.00	0.45	0.20	0.00	1.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>189</b>	<b>253</b>	<b>1051</b>	<b>444</b>	<b>807</b>	<b>487</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>3623</b>

**Table 8: Frequency of Participant Background by Year**

<b>Year</b>	<i>Federal Govt</i>	<i>State Govt</i>	<i>Local Govt</i>	<i>Researcher-Author</i>	<i>Arts Nonprofit (non-presenting)</i>	<i>Arts Nonprofit (presenting)</i>	<i>Other Nonprofit</i>	<i>Commerical Organization</i>	<i>Artist</i>	<b>Total</b>
1992	54	69	65	79	253	156	275	127	27	1105
	0.05	0.06	0.06	0.07	0.23	0.14	0.25	0.11	0.02	1.00
1996	32	38	73	64	403	175	268	175	16	1244
	0.03	0.03	0.06	0.05	0.32	0.14	0.22	0.14	0.01	1.00
2000	54	49	51	110	395	113	264	185	53	1274
	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.09	0.31	0.09	0.21	0.15	0.04	1.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>216</b>	<b>302</b>	<b>317</b>	<b>1059</b>	<b>1401</b>	<b>980</b>	<b>1157</b>	<b>519</b>	<b>2584</b>	<b>3623</b>

## **CHAPTER 4: If Meetings Matter, How Would We Know? A Case Study in Meeting Assessment**

This chapter will briefly describe an evaluation project we conducted in cooperation with the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA) and Americans for the Arts (AFA).<sup>21</sup> The larger “Meetings that Matter” project was designed to evaluate what actually transpires at meetings held in the cultural sector. In particular, we have examined what issues capture people’s attention and how conference participants and leaders in the cultural sector engage in policy talk. We have, in a sense, been working entirely within the box, focusing primarily on the content and structure of policy discourse. While there are many advantages to such a design, one disadvantage is that our findings are almost entirely divorced from real world policy or from the decisions and actions that cultural leaders pursue daily. Therefore, when NASAA and AFA approached us about designing an assessment project that would investigate more deeply what people actually learn from a conference experience and how this learning influences their work and practice, we were eager to become involved. The assessment project provides an important complement to the larger research agenda.

### **Background**

pARTicipate 2001, the joint summer meeting of the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies and Americans for the Arts, heralded a new effort on the part of the two associations to encourage formal and informal communications between state and local arts organizations. With its theme “Liveable Communities,” the conference highlighted 10 issue areas or “characteristics” (Diversity, Elected Officials, Arts Learning, Arts

Participation, Arts and Business, Arts and New Economy, Public Art, Individual Artists, Civic Dialogue, and Leadership). An in-depth evaluation was conducted to measure the relative success of the joint meeting in terms of its impact on the attendees. The evaluation ascertains what participants learned and, more importantly, what strategies and actions they undertook as a result of having attended the meeting.

## **Methodology**

The assessment tool was divided into two phases and included a sample size of 39 conference attendees. Of the 39, 16 were from state arts agencies, 11 from local arts agencies, and the remaining 12 identified themselves as arts advocates, presenters, consultants, educators, or as representatives of another occupations or organizations.

Phase I was conducted via telephone during the two weeks after the conference.

Participants were asked questions (101 questions, approximately 40 minutes) about their background, expectations of and experiences at the conference, what they learned, and what tasks they intended to pursue as a result of having attended the meeting.<sup>22</sup> For Phase II, approximately six months later, respondents were again contacted by telephone for follow-up interviews (100 questions, approximately 30 minutes) in order to determine the long-term impact of the conference. The questions aimed to identify what participants accomplished during those six months and, if they were unable to accomplish an action, to ascertain possible barriers to action.

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<sup>21</sup> The authors wish to thank Kelly Barsdate of the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies for her helpful direction and advice regarding the assessment project described here.

<sup>22</sup> Tasks included: circulating information or ideas from this meeting to staff or board; pursuing new partnerships or collaborations; including new information in external communications; initiating a conversation or convening; participating in advocacy or outreach; creating or refining a program;

While most of the questions on the survey were structured around multiple choice answers, respondents were also given open-ended questions, revealing additional insights into what they learned, what was important to them, and what actions they took as a result of the conference.

### **Summary**

The assessment study is the first of its kind, at least that the authors know of, that has attempted to track, in detail, the learning and follow-up resulting from a meeting or convention. Conference evaluations typically take the form of relatively straightforward questionnaires that ask participants to rate particular sessions (e.g., Did you like the session? Why? Why not?), or to rate their overall experience at a conference. In contrast, this study has sought to delineate carefully the various ways a conference of this type might have an impact on its participants – strengthening networks, re-orienting perceptions, shaping programs and strategies, developing leadership, encouraging partnerships, and identifying important relationships, to name a few. Further, the study goes beyond first impressions and reactions in order to track participants over six months. It was important to determine not only what participants thought of the conference, but also what they planned to do as a result of having attended and, more importantly, what they actually did. This information is less helpful for identifying ways to *tweak* a conference (e.g., improve formats, speakers, topics, and logistics) than it is for determining how to *shape* a gathering to achieve both practical and policy consequences in the broader field. In other words, the assessment instrument employed for the study,

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conducting research or collect information; inviting someone new to a meeting; and contacting an elected

we believe, will help conference organizers to design future meetings that more effectively advance art and culture and its impact on communities.

With regards to *pARTicipate2001*, results indicate that the meeting produced an incredible amount of follow-up activity. Respondents in the survey left the meeting with a large “wish-list” of tasks they intended to pursue when they returned to their home organizations and communities. Six months later, respondents reported that they had embarked on the majority of those tasks (more than 60 percent) and planned to start on most of the rest. Although details about each task pursued are not available, many of them fall into categories of activity that are clearly oriented toward shaping their environments or broadening their constituencies (e.g., pursuing partnerships, contacting elected officials, and inviting someone new to a meeting). In other words, *pARTicipate 2001* did not simply spur activity aimed at improving individual organizational performance (e.g., fundraising, program development, and marketing, etc.), but it had a significant impact on policy and “community building” more broadly. Of course, it is possible that activity reports are exaggerated for a number of reasons (vagueness of question wording, poor respondent recall, and difficulty isolating the effects of the meeting – e.g., people may credit the meeting for inspiring tasks they might have done anyway). Nonetheless, participants perceived that the meeting had a real impact on their work, their networks, and their thinking, and as W.I. Thomas wrote in 1931, “if we define situations as real, they become real in their consequence” (189). If participants believed the “meeting mattered,” then most likely it did, and similar meetings in the future will as

well. Yet, in future assessment studies, we should strive for additional refinement to the survey instrument to enable more confident conclusions about overall impact.

Perhaps more important than overall impact, the present study sensitizes us to the fact that participants can have very different experiences at the same meeting. Some reported high levels of learning, others did not; one respondent pursued only seven follow-up tasks, while another pursued sixty; some respondents excelled at one type of task (e.g., pursuing partnerships; while others excelled at something entirely different (e.g., contacting elected officials). Participants also approach a meeting or conference with very different expectations (from learning about trends in the arts to identifying partners and improving leadership). Although the sample was not large enough to draw strong conclusions, findings suggest that a participant's experience level influences how he or she approaches and responds to a meeting. Veterans in the field may look to meetings to help identify new partnerships or get program ideas, while people early in their careers might be looking to enrich networks and learn about trends. Thus, future assessment projects must think carefully about trying to differentiate the impact of a meeting on different types of participants.<sup>23</sup> Meeting organizers should use the results of future studies, as well as their own intuitions, to better connect diverse meeting outcomes with equally diverse types of participants.

The current study also suggests that different topics or issue areas are likely to yield a variety of outcomes. Some topics are more likely to generate new learning, while others lead to tangible action steps. For example, 70 percent of respondents reported that they

learned something new about the *arts and the new economy*, while only 30 percent reported learning something new about *art and education*. Yet, when it came to executing a particular task, 76 percent of all arts education oriented tasks were either completed or begun by the time of the second interview, while respondents made progress on just 43 percent of the tasks related to the new economy. This finding makes sense if we consider that “art and the new economy” represents an abstract concept with no specific institutional or programmatic presence, and arts education programs are present, in some form, in most organizations or agencies. Therefore, participants might have an easier time pursuing tasks around this issue as well as other issues with an already established institutional and community presence. This points out the need to assess not only specific actions or outcomes, but also barriers to action. Are there structural factors (e.g., organizational structure, funding, staff) that prevent participants from pursuing certain goals? Do barriers result from a lack of information or skill? Are there perceptual barriers (e.g., lack of understanding in the community or among colleagues)? Again, different barriers will be more or less salient depending on the type of action (e.g., circulating information or starting a new program) and the particular issue at hand (diversity, arts education, art and business, etc.). In the present study, for instance, it was found that lack of available time (“I am too busy”) was a major barrier for those wishing to pursue advocacy and outreach.

There is one other area of learning and follow-up that deserves a brief mention – relationship building. Based on a battery of questions about the importance of the meeting for strengthening networks, finding program partners, and building relationships

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<sup>23</sup> To do so requires a larger sample size so that meaningful correlations can be computed between the

in the community, we draw the tentative conclusion that attendees used the meeting to enrich networks (general relationship building) and to identify partnerships and collaborations around specific programs (purposeful relationship building), but not necessarily for gaining ideas about strengthening relationships outside the field or developing new constituencies in an effort to shape their environments (strategic or political relationship building). While these are very preliminary findings, they suggest that future meeting organizers should think more carefully about the different dimensions of “relationship building” and which types of programs and offerings might best advance each dimension.

In conclusion, the assessment emphasizes the need to develop better theories about the consequences of meetings (e.g, who will be affected by what type of program in what context and to what extent), along with better methods to measure these impacts.

*pARTicipate2001* was certainly a meeting that “mattered”, and with stronger theories and better measurement, future gatherings of this type can play an even more prominent role in helping arts leaders and advocates better connect the arts to “liveable communities” or otherwise advance cultural policy goals. Most importantly, we hope the evaluation technique used in this study can serve as a model for future conveners and scholars to improve on when devising ways to measure the impact of their meetings. In short, we need to move beyond traditional methods of meeting evaluation. Assessment instruments should pay closer attention to what scholars call “knowledge uptake” (what do

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characteristics of a participant and the various types of outcomes.

participants actually learn at a conference) and “policy transfer” (what decisions they make as a result of that learning).

## CHAPTER 5: Reflections and Recommendations

This research project *Meetings that Matter* arose from a concern that the existing landscape of meetings in the cultural field resembles a prairie of scattered sagebrush, with few overlapping concerns and few landmark convenings that serve to guide policy development locally or nationally. In our original project proposal, we set out a hypothesis that policy discussions happen “arbitrarily... such meetings fail to lead to action; they exist in their own frameworks. They yield contacts; they make conversation and exchange possible, but they are not purposeful. They do not advance beyond their immediate agenda.” Our research was designed to test this hypothesis, or more precisely, to answer the question: “Do meetings matter for advancing cultural policy?” We approached the research question from a variety of angles: **theoretically**, by examining the broader literature on policy making, as well specific case studies of meetings in other fields, in order to draw lessons and implications for arts and culture; **discursively and ethnographically**, by attending the annual meetings of arts service associations and recording and interpreting how people at these meetings talked about problems and policy; and **empirically**, by looking at a sample of conference program books over ten years and coding and analyzing what issues were discussed and who was invited to discuss them. We also studied, in detail, what a random sample of 40 participants say they learned at a particular annual convention and what policy-relevant actions they took as a result of having attended the meeting.

Overall, we find that meetings are **not** currently effective tools for advancing policy in the cultural sector, with some notable exceptions mentioned at the end of chapter 2.

Based on our review of the policy literature, we suggest that strategic convenings, if designed correctly, can and do make a difference for advancing policy in other fields. In arts and culture, where resources are modest, where the policy community is fragmented, where problems are poorly defined, where there is no central authority or government agency, and where issues have low salience for the general public, well-timed and carefully orchestrated meetings can perhaps play an even more important role than they do in other fields.

Furthermore, we find that although many field-wide issues and policy concerns are brought up at the annual meetings of the major arts service associations, most of these discussions focus on articulating grievances and identifying broad problems rather than on devising policy alternatives, pinpointing policy windows, building consensus or putting policy into action. Participants either lack the inclination or know-how to engage in policy conversations that are focused and purposeful and generate practical solutions for advancing policy. Nonetheless, conference attendees, especially those arts leaders who participated in the roundtable discussions, are aware that cultural policy is increasingly germane to their work and, more importantly, that they need to reconsider traditional approaches. They feel the arts community must move beyond advocacy efforts geared toward increasing funding for cultural agencies at the local, state, and national level. They argue that arts leaders should work to secure a seat at the larger policy table, sitting side-by-side with decision makers from such policy domains as

transportation, housing, economic development, and human services, and engaging in debate about how to strengthen communities, improve the quality of life, spur the economy, and generally contribute to citizens' well being. Accordingly, they believe that the arts community should also avail itself of grants and resources provided by non-arts related government departments and programs and should pursue more non-appropriation based strategies (e.g., regulation, tax incentives, in-kind provision of space or materials, etc.).

When we look at the program books of several national arts service associations over ten years, we confirm the fact that the policy community is fragmented with few issues, especially concrete policy-relevant issues, dominating the agenda. Also, contrary to expectations, there are not more policy-focused panels and discussions in the year 2000 than there were in 1992. Nor are recent sessions (2000) more likely to focus on local, state and national issues, rather than internal, managerial ones. Finally, the proportion of speakers invited from outside the cultural sector has not increased (in fact, it has declined) since 1992. In short cultural policy has not risen dramatically on the agenda nor is the cultural community engaging more with issues and with participants from other sectors. This does not mean that cultural policy discussions do not bubble up in the course of informal conversation and within the context of many formal conference sessions. Nor does it mean that there have not been other smaller, more specialized, policy-focused meetings throughout the sector. But, for the most part, cultural policy

discussions have not been noticeably integrated into the formal design of the national association meetings.<sup>24</sup>

Given these preliminary findings, we outline several strategies for improving and strengthening meetings in an effort to advance cultural policy debate and action.

### **Strategic convenings – task forces, commissions and policy thrusts**

*Build and foster policy communities within art and culture.* Consider the creation of a convening authority an independent body, or honest broker, that can support special forums (what we are calling “policy thrusts”) to bring together different parts of the cultural sector to engage in focused and deliberate dialogue and to move from strategy and problem identification to consensus building, action plans, common research needs, and coalitions around pressing policy problems. The convening authority could re-grant funds to associations and organizations to design meetings around topics they feel are ripe for intervention. It might also organize a few select meetings around concerns that have no natural institutional base (such as art and access in rural America or creative economy initiatives). This convening mechanism would need to be a responsive and flexible so that it could support strategic policy thrusts in a timely manner (i.e., when issues or problems are ripe for coordinated action and research), in a variety of areas and using a diverse range of formats.

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<sup>24</sup> Again, this is a criterion (integrating policy into formal design of meeting) that we imposed on the associations based on our research question. These associations do not necessarily organize their annual meetings with this goal in mind.

*Define problems, set agendas, develop policy alternatives and reform government services and programs.* Arts leaders should encourage foundations and governments to create taskforces, working groups, and special commissions to advise and interject in policy conversations at the local, state and federal levels. Such strategic meetings can help to lift a cultural policy issue onto the public's agenda by reframing a problem (or calling attention to a report that might otherwise be overlooked). Where a problem is already recognized and well documented, they can provide decision makers with carefully considered alternatives. In addition, these special convenings can legitimate a cultural policy or program that already has the support of key political actors. Finally, special task forces and commissions can pressure governments to improve the delivery of resources and services by suggesting ways for agencies and departments to coordinate efforts or reform programs to better meet the needs of the cultural community and the public at large. Those meetings can be supported by public or private funds, and in some cases foundations might partner with the government to help sponsor these activities. It is important to narrow the focus of a task force or working group not simply "the arts in San Diego," for example, but a topic that can yield practical policy recommendations: for example, youth and creativity; quality of life; spaces for creativity; cultural districts; creative industries; and support for working artists, etc etc.. Also, it is worth considering what type of task force at the national level could serve as the impetus for local-level action and convening. One example would be to organize a national working group around the notion of the "creative economy" with the explicit goal of fostering local level discussions. Tepper (2002) has noted that creative economy initiatives are likely to be most effective at the local and regional levels. However, a

carefully designed national initiative, perhaps supported by a working group or blue ribbon commission and a highly visible report, might successfully spur local-level attention to this issue.

### **Improving meetings of national arts service associations**

*Improve methods to document policy discussions at annual meetings.* How can associations better capture what transpires at their meetings in order to sharpen and identify policy concerns and articulate next steps? Associations might adopt a more formal approach to documenting the policy-oriented comments and discussions that take place at annual meetings. They could consider using a method similar to the one employed in the research described above – that is, have “reporters” attend sessions and serve as “policy ethnographers,” writing down all policy-relevant comments. By identifying these statements, tracking policy concerns and more systematically documenting what is discussed, association staff and the broader membership can better gauge the policy dimensions of a conference session. More importantly, such information gathering techniques might help associational leaders better recognize where, along the policy ladder certain issues fall, which are ripe for action, and which require more deliberate conversations before moving forward. Perhaps graduate students interested in cultural policy (at the various cultural policy centers and arts administration programs) could be given travel and conference stipends to be the official “policy ethnographers” at these meetings, with the extra benefit of leadership training for emerging cultural policy actors.

*Offer professional training and development: policy education through workshops.*

While practitioners and local leaders in the cultural field are interested in policy issues, they generally have an immature understanding of the policy making process. Just as many nonprofit arts organizations became enthralled with the language of management consulting in the 1980s and 1990s (organizational vision, stakeholder management, input/output models, creative teams, client-centered services, and bottom-up information), it might be time to introduce “policy making” as an area of professional training and development. One approach is to hold mini-seminars, or pre-conference workshops, that are designed to help conference participants engage in deliberative policy making. The workshop would explore the policy making process, using the policy ladder as a point of departure. These seminars can be thought of as a two-stage process. The first year could focus on pedagogical goals, exposing participants to basic policy literature and helping them to recognize what constitutes a policy discussion (for example, these discussions must acknowledge limited resources, set priorities, establish criteria for making decisions regarding scarce resources, and evaluate the political opportunity structure). This seminar could be designed around a case study, where participants work together on a simulated policy problem and try to advance along the policy ladder from problem definition to recognizing windows of opportunity, devising alternatives, building consensus, developing an action plan, and implementing and evaluating a policy. During the second stage (perhaps the next year) participants might work through a real and pressing issue from their own organization or community. This workshop might also involve a mapping exercise to help cultural leaders recognize the policy landscape in their communities (see Schuster’s model, *Mapping State Cultural Policy*, 2002) as well as

strategies to identify non-appropriation-based policy tools. Again, the overall goal of these seminars would be to strengthen the capacity of cultural professionals (through learning and skills building) in order to help them to advance policy in their communities.

*Organize policy roundtables:* During our roundtable conversations with arts leaders at each of the national association meetings, many participants lamented the fact that informal, post-meeting dialogue does not happen more often. In particular, they enjoyed the opportunity, after a typically frantic meeting schedule, to sit down with colleagues and reflect on what they had learned and to talk broadly about policy concerns. Not all participants will want to participate in these forums, but associations might consider handpicking a group of leaders each year to engage in similar conversations near or at the end of an annual meeting. The roundtables need not be designed to advance particular policy objectives. Rather, they might be viewed as relatively convenient ways to link up leaders within a field or subsector in order to exchange ideas and to think about policy issues and challenges.

*Diversify participants and panelists and publicize and promote cultural policy expert:* Although there is much discussion about connecting the arts with other disciplines and sectors, most conference sessions still draw predominantly on leaders and experts from within the cultural sector. Conference organizers need to work hard to diversify participants and panelists and draw in experts from outside the arts. By doing so, not only will more diverse perspectives be represented, but also sessions can make new connections with panelists who bring outside expertise or who represent opportunities for

inter-sectoral partnerships. In addition to outside speakers, annual meetings could feature more effectively speakers from within the cultural sector who have policy expertise. In fact, we suggest a public relations strategy aimed at publicizing and marketing top scholars and speakers in the field of cultural policy. This would not simply be a list of experts. Instead, a product-driven brochure featuring speakers, topics and speech titles would be produced and actively marketed to arts groups and allied fields and professions who hold meetings, conventions and other forums where these experts might find platforms. Such a “speakers’ bureau” would facilitate the placement of cultural policy issues on the agenda of all types of associations and meetings throughout the country. It would also serve as a useful overview of the range of topics and concerns addressed by scholars and leaders in the cultural policy field.

*Call attention to the policy dimension of meetings.* Although few of the formal sessions at the annual meetings we studied focused explicitly on policy concerns, many take up indirectly issues germane to cultural policy. In order to highlight the policy dimension of meetings and to help attendees identify policy-relevant conversations, associations might consider identifying a “policy track” at their annual meetings. For example, the National Trust for Historical Preservation included “public policy and legal issues” as one of the 6 to 7 “tracks” or focus areas, at the meeting (learning, organizational development, technology, real estate and financing, rural preservation, and recent past are others). A track is simply a set of conference sessions that fit within a general approach or topic area. Many sessions can be cross-listed under more than one track.

*Conduct formal, in depth evaluations:* National service associations should consider employing more ambitious evaluations – similar in scope to the recent *pARTicipate2001* assessment in order to trace over a period of time the learning and action that results from a meeting. These evaluations can reveal how participants (from junior- to senior-level arts professionals) approach meetings differently and how they take away from these gatherings different lessons and priorities. Ultimately, knowing more about what people learn, where they learn and what they do as a result of that learning, will lead to more effective conference design.

### **Linking up with other fields**

*Cross-sector initiative.* Foundations interested in advancing cultural policy might consider supporting a special initiative to connect cultural policy to more established policy fields and help cultural leaders participate in broader policy discussions in their communities, states or regions. This initiative could focus on 1) workshops to help arts leaders develop strategies for integrating the arts across sectors; and 2) special task forces or working groups aimed at helping local or state governments coordinate cultural activity across agencies and departments – for example, inter-agency taskforces. These working groups might be organized around natural points of common interest (for multiple departments and agencies), such as quality-of-life taskforces, rather than a task force to explore cross-sectoral coordination, with no specific focus.

*Integrate cultural policy concerns onto the agenda of other policy professionals.* There is a wide gap between the professional planning community and the cultural policy

community. Planners need to think more integrally about arts and culture, and they need to understand more fully how the arts can serve the goals of community/urban/regional planning. For example, leaders in the arts community might encourage the American Planning Association to incorporate cultural policy more prominently on their conference agenda. Similarly, cultural policy topics should be better represented at such meetings as the Conference of Mayors; the National Governors Association; travel and tourism conferences; interfaith conventions; the Association of County Executives; regional and national associations of community development professionals and economic development organizations; and other allied groups.

**Research on the role of meetings as instruments of policy making.**

It is clear from our review of the broader policy literature that there is much work that still needs to be done to assess the role of meetings as instruments of policy making. In this report we have attempted to link convenings and forums to existing theories of policy making. But, there are many opportunities to develop more sophisticated theories about when and under what conditions certain types of meetings are most effective. In addition, scholars should continue to look empirically at what factors lead to successful meeting outcomes. Existing case studies (in such fields as health, transportation, and education) do not connect with any particular theoretical perspective or analytical approach. Therefore, each case study reflects the unique circumstances (people, topic, format, and political context) surrounding a particular commission, task force or summit. With a common theoretical framework, future case studies (especially in art and culture, where such studies are currently unavailable) could investigate a similar set of questions

and, collectively, provide an integrated assessment of when meetings matter most for policy development. In addition to focusing on meetings and special convenings, scholars might also analyze policy initiatives that have been successful and then trace their roots to determine where and when meetings were influential in their development.

Scholars working in the area of policy transfer and knowledge uptake have, perhaps, done the most work in terms of linking convenings to policy making; however, even in this area the explicit link between the two is not fully elaborated. As part of the larger research agenda for the cultural policy community, more work should be done (borrowing the tools that John Lavis and colleagues have used in the health sector) to understand better how decision makers locate, assess and use available information in making policy-relevant decisions about the cultural sector. Additionally, cultural policy scholars might consider systematically applying John Kingdon's technique of surveying a field to identify what policy issues are on the agenda in the cultural sector and whether there is an agreed set of policy problems or alternatives.

Finally, our detailed evaluation of the *pARTicipate2001* convention concluded that more analysis and evaluation is needed to understand the unique responses that different individuals – based on career stage or role within an organization (trustee, program manager, director, or educator) – have to a set of conference offerings. Surveys and interviews with a representative and relatively large sample of conference participants can yield useful data for analyzing the relationship among demographics, career profiles, and conference outcomes.

This monograph has identified several of ways that the cultural policy community can benefit from a deliberate approach to meetings and convenings. These include the frequent use of strategic forums like commissions and task forces, policy training for arts professionals and advocates, better design of national association meetings to enhance policy dialogue, greater interaction with policy actors from outside the cultural sector, and research and evaluation into how meetings connect to the policy process and the characteristics of successful policy forums. These approaches can help the arts and culture community make meetings matter for cultural policy.

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